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**HOW DO URBAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS EMERGE AND BRING ABOUT SOCIAL CHANGE: IS FOCUS E15 A REACTION TO AUSTERITY?**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research offers an insight into how a small group of people from diverse backgrounds came together as the Focus E15 campaign and use street activism and occupying space to challenge the policies of Newham Council. This group on first appearance can be seen to relate to the academic work of Mario Diani regarding new social movements. Focus E15 use urban space such as was used by the Occupy Movement and through the use of Art and Social Media enhance their presence outside of East London. The study shows what is important to working-class people and how solidarity is used to achieve goals. Through engaging with and observing this group and their thoughts the thesis adds to existing literature in regards to how to challenge social cleansing and injustice in urban East London. The Focus E15 campaign use tactics keeping them at the forefront of social movements.

## INTRODUCTION

Through attending a lecture regarding social movements at Ruskin College given by one of the Focus E15 support group in 2015 the issues of housing and the Olympic Games 2012 became apparent. The Focus E15 campaign was becoming known for successfully challenging decisions of Newham Council that had commenced from the original mothers losing their accommodation to progressing to challenging social injustices affecting the working class of Stratford in Newham. The research was carried out over a period of time through engagement that opened up questions about this group but also the opportunity to be directed to relevant literature. Also, to observe how this social movement worked and can be said to have progressed social movements theory through actions that claimed small victories.

The first Chapter uses existing literature to position Focus E15 as a new social movement that successfully challenges policy to achieve some of their aims. This is done through considering what defines a social movement through looking at old and new social movement theories. Through considering how communication and framing are used by organisations such as the Occupy movement challenges to changes in housing in London and particularly Stratford acting as a Nomadic War Machine are undertaken.

Chapter 2 considers how the research is undertaken from 2016 into what is occurring in East London through ethnographic research. Through participant observation and interviews with the Focus E15 core group the process of long-term engagement coupled with becoming accepted as a researcher into social movements the Focus E15 core group contributes their knowledge to this. The result is an insight into the thoughts and processes used to challenge statutory institutions and how this social movement operates.

The history and actions of Focus E15 are set out in Chapter 3 that considers some of the direct actions caused by the housing crisis how these challenges are used to achieve success. Participatory research explains the specific issues that are affecting the people of Stratford. While the bigger picture of Newham and its housing crisis is then addressed before the lack of opportunity of obtaining private housing is addressed.

Chapter 4 considers austerity as part of neoliberalism that has given rise to the policies affecting the mothers and residents of Newham. Through explaining how this came about through reforming welfare benefits and the introduction of Universal Credit enabled Newham Council to remove people from the borough. Festival Capitalism used to stage the 2012 Olympic games is seen as the tool to undertake this as part of government policy of regenerating an area.

The findings from the research are discussed in Chapter 5 through the use of key themes after establishing what brought the activists to this area of East London and the Focus E15 campaign. The first theme considered is housing and especially a campaign frame of the 400 empty homes on the Carpenters Estate. Without mentioning the term Festival Capitalism is how the activists relate to what has occurred under a Labour Council where refurbishment of the housing was never an option considered. Lack of housing and how the Welfare Reforms affect this is a topic that commenced the Focus E15 campaign. The Welfare reform Act 2012 personally affected 2 of the core group is addressed through personal stories. These are the stories constantly talked about by people approaching the Saturday stall and have resulted in actions undertaken by the Focus E15 campaign and Nomadic War Machine. Discussion commences with the favourite actions of the core group.

Focus E15 actions are colourful events full of banners and broadcast across social media. The use of Art and Social media actions of this group in addition to informing are used as a tool to recruit new followers and achieve small goals against Newham Council.

In conclusion empty unused homes can be considered to have brought these people together as a social movement. The campaign has gone on to use solidarity to have small victories against Newham Council and the policies of Neoliberalism that redefine an area that does now not meet the needs of the local working-class inhabitants. The campaign has progressed from an issue about housing policy to challenge an economic system through distinctive methods.

## CHAPTER 1 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1.1 Social Movements

Chapter 1 defines Social Movements using the academic work of Mario Diani (1992) as the definition of people from differing individual or group backgrounds have joined together with a shared aim of challenging the political decisions of Newham Council. On first observation of this group and others drawn to support the movement they have no obvious relationship but grew to become an active social movement. This chapter considers old social movements and new social movement theories and the use of communication and framing. The Chapter progresses to consider London and occupying space before considering housing within London, the area of Stratford in Newham and the Nomadic War Machine.

In her seminal article Mario Diani considers new social movements, stating:

Social movements are defined as networks of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in political or cultural conflicts, on the basis of shared collective identities (Diani, 1992:1).

A Social Movement can be a relatively powerless groups in industrial democracies claiming to have influence over the distribution of power and other resources and can occur within a state, community or organisation. These movements have occurred throughout history since the Enlightenment which produced organised forms such as clubs and societies. In current times they often occur in urban areas such as London and other cities to challenge political systems. In Stratford the Focus E15 Campaign (2020), considered a new social movement, is often visited by students, academics and activists in support of the campaign or looking to widen their knowledge through considering how challenges to powerholders have brought successes and publicity. This is as the Focus E15 campaign is considered to focus on the political issues that affects individual lives and are successful in bringing attention to the issues and achieve small victories.

### 1.2 Old Social Movements

The history of social movements originates back to ancient Greece and Rome and participate in many peasant rebellions and protests in the medieval Europe occurring in eighteenth century revolutions and were part of nineteenth century labour movements (Berger and Nehring, 2020).

In Britain from the 1700s many events occurred some unplanned and others undertaken by groups that are considered radical and this can be seen as the rise of what is now termed old social movements. Capitalism was firmly established by the early 1830s as a result of the market economy from 1750-1830. The response to this was resistance from the new working class that occurred from around 1750 to 1840 resulting in radical reform and revolutionary movements. This was organised as workers came together for the first time in large groups and suffered from poor working conditions in factories. As old working guilds had ended protection in work, workers met and formed new forms of organisations. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Government undertook to make these organisations illegal. The response from workers had been to organise friendly societies to mask their covert union activities. One of the first national networks of such a movement was a self-organised network of friendly societies whose aim was to protest against rising food prices (Solfed.org.uk, 2020).

The Food riots of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century is considered the first working-class opposition protests against the government. This had been planned by the Unions and workers undertaking direct action as a social movement. Workers had taken co-ordinated action across the UK including in Carlisle, Newcastle, Nottingham, Cornwall and London by marching on shops and forcing them to sell oats and wheat at a fixed price. Workers also blocked roads, rivers and docks to show solidarity of the people and resulted in the government being unable to guarantee food safety. The government fearing a French Revolution type event occurring in Britain introduced a range of Acts of Parliament to outlaw trade Unions. This was aimed at undermining working class methods of protest but resulted in various organised movements challenging Government policies. These included the Luddite movement with revolutionary aims and various general unions such as the Chartist working class movement forming. This led to a working-class division between those who wanted reform through constitutional routes and those favoured actions to bring about change (Solfed.org.uk, 2020). A social scientist who analysed what was occurring in society was Karl Marx.

Marx who was a social, and economic theorist whose core-ideas are about how the world is divided into classes of the workers and capitalists, who exploit the workers that results in the conflict in society. These ideas are critiqued by Scott McNall (1984) who states:

Marxian offers a powerful framework for understanding the past and future of capitalist societies, in particular, changes in the organisation of work, community, social inequality, state structure, and transitional relations, as well as social movements these changes stimulate (McNall, 1984:473).

The history of what occurred in England and across western Europe is analysed by Marx and is understood by social movements especially prior to 1914. In considering the Marxist system Robert Freedman (1990) stated the influence of Marx on the world is undisputable and he is credited with a fundamental intellectual breakthrough of human understanding of human history in relation to the founding of institutions under capitalism resulting in class conflict. The work of Marx received a significant contribution from Antonio Gramsci. Thomas R. Bates (1975) wrote about this influence as hegemony. Gramsci, the General Secretary of the Italian Communist Party undertook this during his imprisonment. The theory of hegemony was that man was not ruled by force alone but through ideas. Ideas have not eliminated class struggle but they have resulted in allowing western societies to survive through the dominance of one group using cultural, economic or political means.

In their work, Anindya Sen and Omer Avci (2016) discussed some other prominent theories from the 1950s, which are considered old social movement theories. These theories were developed when there was an explosion of protests and demonstrations against governments, policies and existing social practices. One of these theories is Deprivation Theory which came about as people felt they were deprived of a specific resource, goods or service. Deprivation can be absolute or relative and was prevalent in the Civil Rights movement when black people were deprived of basic rights, this is absolute deprivation. While a relative position can be where a group has a disadvantageous position such as gay people in the feminist movement. During the 1960's social movements reacted to grievances due to conflicts in society, this created political opportunities. This change was characterised by activists coming together seen as a mobilisation of movements creating resources, and group organisation, known as Resource Mobilisation Theory (Jenkins, 1983). Mobilising resources, the banding together of likeminded individuals can be considered collective action.

What these movements achieved was changes in society and some of these loosely organised groups started to form into political parties many of these being based on the political left of society. Through forming as groups collective power could be used to challenge on behalf of excluded groups of people such as black slaves from West Africa in the UK. This can be seen to lead to a change in social movements that are considered New Social Movements

### 1.3 New Social Movement Theories

This section uses the post-industrial age from 1960 to consider new social movements and where and how they grew to influence political decisions and society. Social Movement theories had started to change in the 1960s as society moved to a post-industrial age whereas previous social movements had been based on an industrial economy. New Social Movement focus on issues related to human rights rather than economic and political ideologies. Social change that was emerging revolved around identity, lifestyle and culture (Foweraker, 1995). These movements attempted to change public policy to take account of this. John Hannigan (2016) critiqued the work of Alain Touraine and Manuel Castells stating new social movement theory was distinct from existing approaches as it was concerned with social change that came from outside of traditional institutional origins.

According to Steve Buechler (1995), New Social Movement Theory grew in Europe as a response to what was considered to be the inadequacies of classical Marxism. The feeling was that classical Marxism did not grasp contemporary forms of collective action. Marxism considered all politically significant social action to be derived from the fundamental economic logic of the production of capitalism, with social relationships rooted in the process of production and all other social identities as secondary. While in contrast, new social movement theory considered the logistics of actions to be based on politics, ideology, and culture rooted in collective action.

Steve Buechler (1995) considered New Social Movement Theory to be a variation on theories of classical Marxism. This new theory follows certain themes. Firstly, it involves symbolic action in civil society which could be, for example, the occupation of a building by a group of people. Secondly, it stresses the importance of processes that promote autonomy and self-determination which can be as simple as a prisoner going on hunger strike. Thirdly, the emphasis is on the role of postmaterialist values of identity. Overall, this theory emphasises the often-fragile process of constructing collective identities and identifying group interests instead of assuming that conflict groups and their interests are structurally determined. New social movement theory recognises a variety of submerged, latent, and temporary networks that often underpin collective action. Scott Lash and John Urry (1984), in their article regarding collective action places an emphasis on agency involving direct action. Actions often use class solidarity to mobilize as groups look to solve issues within society. The undertaking of actions will often lead to a demand for investigation into an issue that is not being addressed.

New social movements have moved away from classical Marxism as many of the people who would be considered as the working class do not have a common class consciousness or desire for a revolution. Although many people or groups will campaign week in week out on the streets promoting their beliefs and building support. In a discussion of western Marxism, Sebastiano Timpanaro (1975) suggests the major concern is a defence against the accusation of materialism. Materialism is concerned that something is idealistic so a

discussion on both is required and it is how groups set their own position with regard to this, possibly influenced by the ideas of post materialism.

Richard Inglehart's seminal paper (1981) presented the case that post-war affluence has led to a shift from materialist to post materialist values. The recession of the mid 1970s created a 'new class' that furnished ideologies for environmentalism which created groups who were keen on promoting the environment and anti-nuclear ideas. While materialists were interested in satisfying immediate physiological needs post-materialists were secure with these and more directed to invest time in more remote concerns like politics. As they were unhappy with established order and they supported social change middle class support for the left built. The result was legislation advancing human equality so advancing social welfare standards protecting the consumer and environment.

The shift from old to new movements according to Peter Funke and Todd Wolfson (2017) occurred within the age of industrial capitalism and mass production. Production occurred in factories where 'Fordist' systems had become commonplace. The conveyor belt process meant each man's job depended on the previous one so creating a sense of teamwork and resulted in organisations later emerging as Trade Unions in the workplace. This created Trade Unions with hierarchical structures and organisation potential to represent the shop floor workers. The idea of collaboration meant problems were solved jointly so people tended to collaborate and create solidarity in numbers.

In the 1970s, inflation was running high, by 1975 it had reached 25% largely as the result of the increased price of oil having increased by 16% in 1974 (Pettinger, 2016). The result of this was increased prices in the shops and with high wage demands not being met led to strike action by workers. Continual strike action led to factories such as car plants closing down as union leaders demanded wage increases that employers were not prepared to meet. In his article on Trade Unions, Bill Mitchell (2016) reported on papers from the 1970s that had become available that indicated the Conservative and Labour Governments of the early 1970s treated these Unions as 'job killers'. As union demands were seen as unreasonable and unfeasible by employers this led to job losses. This resulted in governments coming under intense pressure to introduce legislation to prevent Unions having too much power.

The old 'Fordist' work had been replaced by new flexible work, and the shock of the 1973 oil crisis resulted in a change from Keynesian to neoliberal policies. David Harvey (2007) wrote that Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister in 1979 with a mandate to curb trade union power and the idea of solidarity in numbers. While in 1980 Ronald Regan became president of the United States with his own agenda to curb the power of labour. Working practices of the world changed, and monetary policies were used to control inflation, this was part of the ideology of neoliberalism; liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms through strong private property rights, free markets and free trade.

As society had moved from a poor agrarian to rich post-industrial people felt more secure with national economic security in Western society. People were becoming more concerned with personal happiness and self-expression. Ronald Inglehart (1977) describes this as post war affluence with a greater importance on non-material goods as post material values became of importance to many. Today as people are becoming economically comfortable, they tend not question decisions such as why public land is sold to provide private housing in areas where major sporting events are set. Yet in areas where demographic changes

become obvious with divisions people start to consider what has occurred and whether the changes may not have been an advantage.

Richard Giulianotti et al. (2014) describes this process as Festival Capitalism. With the large amount of money involved in hosting these types of events quite often rumours develop of corruption and crime being involved, such as events like the London Olympics. Many people in Newham believe the previous administration of Sir Robin Wales that oversaw the Olympic bid were corrupt and the promised benefit to the local community has not happened. When Michael Gillard (2019) published his book relating to this the influence of gangsters on the games these thoughts were exposed.

This was occurring at a time when communication had undergone a big revolution with stories and acts of resistance previously told by art and flyers. Today New Social Movements express this further through displaying the art of resistance of protest on the internet. Melody K. Milbrandt (2010) stated that previously artistic expression had informed what was occurring in the world through maintaining social traditions. Art, is used to show issues of social injustice but also to encourage social change; empower and deepen commitment; inform larger society about social issues, harmonize social activists and inform internally to express and reinforce values and ideas.

In current times thanks to the internet and instant mass communication art is used by New Social Movements to communicate instantly to wider audiences, by posting pictures of banners at events on social media. By reaching wider audiences' relationships between groups are built and new people are brought into existing social movements through technology and communication. This form of communication is not in the hands of elites who use news stories to have their ideas heard. At times the only opposite view came from books such as written by Gillard (2019). The book is about the links between business, politics and organized crime following a turf war between crime families over the control of a valuable strip of land. While in recent times the internet communication has changed, influence now comes from those involved in protests using social media to display stark statements through posting pictures of banners.

#### **1.4 Communication**

This section considers how communication changed due to the internet and is used by social movements. In their academic paper Jeroen Van Laer and Peter Van Aelst (2010) considered the Zapatista uprising commencing in 1994 and the Battle of Seattle in 1999 in terms of how the internet changed social movements. Manuel Castells (2015) considered how economic distress, cynicism towards politicians and cultural emptiness resulting in personal hopelessness could overthrow dictatorships. The hopelessness is reflected in Thessa Lageman's (2016) report questioning if the action of Tunisian graduate called Mohamed Bouazizi, who unable to obtain work in his field, had set himself on fire and started the Arab spring had been worthwhile? What had occurred was police had confiscated Mohamed's scales as he refused to pay a bribe, this was followed by a policewoman allegedly slapping him and insulting his deceased father and being unable to complain about this he set himself on fire. His cousin Ali filmed this and on December 17<sup>th</sup> 2010 posted a video on Facebook called *The Intifada of the People of Sidi Bouzid* as he was convinced the only way to change corrupt Tunisian media was to give international media a true story.

As communication became instant, a single mobile phone could trigger events that were broadcast without any editing. Nouredine Miladi (2016) stated, the events of the Arab

Spring that started in Tunisia in December 2010 culminated in a revolution in 2011. Ilham Allagui and Johanne Kuebler (2011) in considering the role of ICTs in the Arab Spring that began with an uprising in Tunisia in December 2010 led to similar revolts later, in Egypt, Libya, Yeman, Syria, Bahrain, and other Arab nations using mobile communications. Allagui and Kuebler called this a '*Facebook Revolution*' where deep problems of corruption and dysfunction was toxic in most Arab states and the population decided to put an end to this. They used Facebook, mobile phones, Youtube, etc by protesting peacefully on the streets and broadcasting events. although some people died a peaceful, unarmed uprising won a revolution.

This Arab revolution demonstrated the power of networks that resulted in people mobilising due to socioeconomic issues. With a diversity of actors across the world, some of whom can be seen as organisers in what is a grassroots democracy, having had no trust in traditional groups such as Trade Unions and political parties, they were now able to achieve political change through this method. This has started to be seen in the UK in a response to government policies that came in in the UK with the Coalition Government.

In the UK under the Coalition Government of 2010-15 (House of Commons Library, 2020) people of different cultures and nationalities from across urban areas had used framing such as challenging the Housing and Planning Act and social media to build to a large protest such as on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> June 2015. This protest/action, *Axe The Housing Act*, included housing groups from Lambeth and other areas of London, The Radical Housing Network; Defend Council Housing; groups from areas such as Milton Keynes and Boating Communities who marched across London to a rally outside the Houses of Parliament. Due to the numbers involved, disruption to traffic this resulted in news and newspaper having to report events. This was in addition to posts and pictures on social media such a blocking Westminster Bridge. Much of this legislation has not been passed into law due to such actions (*Axe The Housing Act*, 2015).

This use of collective action and social media is in the seminal article of Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg (2011). They write about the history of social movements' collective action during times of contentions within politics across the world, from the period of the Arab Spring to Occupy Wall Street and other large-scale sustained protests. During this time small and established organisations use technologies for personalised public engagement. Through examining organizational dynamics, it explains how large-scale action networks of collective action use digital media. The organisational planning of collective actions, the actions based on personalised content shared on social media platforms. These networks build large-scale actions during a time of contention in recent times.

Bennett and Segerberg (2011) critiqued how in modern democracies very noticeably younger people were moving away from political parties, reform movements, and ideologies. In effect people are relating differently to organised politics tending to engage with affiliated groups rather than mainstream political parties. Much of this is through technology and social media using personal networks. Although collective action is based on collective identifications these networks continue to play a role in daily politics as digital media starts to be used for organisation and much of the flow is online. The result being people now act across varies issues at different scales although there is face to face organising happening in the background. The networks that are continuing to develop are personalised to collective actions and engage citizens to highlight issues and obtain changes in policy that develops from framing. People are influenced and become active through using Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, but this media like newsprint is not neutral.

Brian Wilson (2006) researched the shift from main stream to social media with regard to daily politics and concluded with web 2.0 developments it was still possible to communicate opinion rather than fact. This results in instant communication information still being loaded towards one view point. The governments and corporations who had monopolised and controlled media coverage throughout history can now not control what is broadcast using the internet and so are losing their power of influence. With this cyberspace being a safe way to communicate, people who had previously been unable to have their concerns around poverty and social injustice heard are able to express their concerns through activism using framing. The actions in Tunisia were a good illustration of what is known as framing as was the *Axe the Housing Act* protest in London.

## 1.5 Framing

This section discusses what framing is and how it is used, and considers the advantages and disadvantages. The term of framing can be considered as finding a subject that can be used as a description of a problem and this may differ depending on your point of view. Kate Daellenbach and Joy Parkinson (2016) argue that social movements are often disjointed but attempt to gain a social benefit through the use of framing. David Snow (2013) considered framing, within the context of social movements, stating that they are ideas undertaken as challenges relevant to the movement in pursuit of its interests against adversaries usually institutions and those pursuing social control. Frames are considered to have three core functions; firstly, to focus attention of what is a frame in relation to the particular challenge, secondly, to enable one set of meanings to be gathered together so one story is told and finally to enable attention to be focused. Robert Benford and David Snow (2000), consider core framing occurs in three stages: diagnostic framing, prognostic framing, and motivational framing. Diagnostic framing is the identification of the problem which will usually be seen to contain an injustice while a solution to the problem is known as prognostic framing. The third stage, motivational framing is how to engage with the organisation seen as responsible for the issue.

The result is social movements use frames to highlight problems that need to be open to debate. Through mobilising people, those identified as the cause can be exposed to a wider audience through leaders using participants. Within a social movement there are distinct groups: the leaders and activists, rank-and-file supporters, recruits and significant others. In his article Richard Johnson (1987) wrote about how an individual assesses information:

judgements are a function of: (a) inferences based upon known information, and (b) an Incomplete Information Bias which is consistent across levels of the presented attribute-information (Johnson, 1987:69).

Through using an experimental consumer evaluation regarding ground beef illustrates this. Firstly, the effect of inferring missing information about product quality is manipulated, without affecting the incomplete Information bias, by pushing the perceived relationship that the greater the price the greater the quality. Secondly, there are two factors that do not affect the inference process; the (favourable or unfavourable) descriptive label, or frame, of the attribute for which information is missing and the subjects' prior knowledge of the class of alternatives (Johnson, 1987).

The making of a judgement is affected by the effectiveness of one-sided and two-sided messaging without prior knowledge. How, the information is used is related to the collective

identity of the social movement and is the reason people participate in actions is their disagreement with a policy. Although the focus of the action can be limited in time and space, today this can be enhanced by using social media to broadcast it on the internet to a wider audience. An advantage of this is the frame/action or organisation can reach a wider audience often resulting in new followers. While a disadvantage is when using qualitative research, the research is usually made up of those who have empathy for the aims of the movement (Alvesson, 1996). In, London with many protests based on similar goals against the policies of government, the framing tends to be around what is seen as an attack on the urban population.

## **1.6 London, Social Movements, Occupy**

The section on London and Social Movements considers how cities can be considered the birth of social movements and resistance to urban change through using new tactics of occupying space from the 1990s.

David Bailey (2020) considered the 2000s was a decade of protest across the UK with much protest centred on the capital London. The social peace of the 1990s and 2000s due to the economic crisis of 2008 and the policy of austerity resulted in a period of social conflict. Bailey's research found in London in 2019 there were 280 reported protests compared with 154 in 2010 and only 83 in 2007, the year before the global economic crisis.

Within the protests there were culture and social divisions which created conditions for social movements and protest. In his formative work Manuel Castells (1983) states social change takes place along the three dimensions of production (class domination), experience (which for reasons that are never made clear he equates with gender domination), and power (state domination). Challenges in capitalist society occur in space. Henri Lefebvre (1991) considers this antagonism occurs in space that is organized for production and comes from the lived experience of everyday life where social groupings gather. The social divisions across the world that had occurred had resulted in actions against those seen as the privileged including in Seattle and the Arab Spring, as previously mentioned. As Sam Halvorsen (2015) wrote protests of occupying urban space had taken place in North America and cities across the world. These urban protests used the practice of occupying urban space to challenge divisions in society.

On October 15<sup>th</sup> 2011, Occupy London set up in the financial district of London where between 2000 and 3000 people gathered in a courtyard next to St Paul's Cathedral and subsequently in Finsbury Square. The original camp lasted until 25<sup>th</sup> February 2012, becoming one of the longest gatherings in the Occupy movement. Stuart Lowe (1986) described urban social movements as groups of people outside the formal political party system joining together to challenge the lack of provision of urban public services and to protect the local environment. Occupy London may be considered one such social movement as people collectively mobilised themselves to gain momentum in an attempt to change policy direction.

The fight was for a new policy direction to politics looking to obtain a new economic and environmental system of democracy. Occupy London had started with an occupation of the City of London on the 15<sup>th</sup> October 2011. The next day a collective statement of 500 people was delivered:

Like all forms of direct democracy, the statement will always be a work in progress

and is used as a basis for further discussions and debate (Occupy London, 2012).

The Occupy movement was looking to engage with people to highlight issues over the planned cuts to public services that was caused by the financial sector which brought about political austerity. The aim was to change the system to support people rather than global corporations whose only concern was with profit margins.

Jenny Pickerill and John Krinsky (2012) concluded the significance and achievements of Occupy were: using spatial strategies of disruption such as camping and marching in specific locations in London highlighting the inequalities in society. This temporary occupation of space aimed to show that what was presumed to be public space was often owned by private corporations or individuals. The use of slogans such as reference to '99% of people against the 1% who own the wealth consequently created an 'us and them' mentality. Focusing exclusively on the wealth differences between people, unfortunately resulted in people such as the homeless being ignored, as some sites were set up in areas used by the homeless to sleep. This type of spatial occupation can be considered the start of passionate activism not seen for several years in the UK.

Protests are often against Capitalism and David Harvey (2013) contends that this originated from the start of the 1990's neoliberal policy. Through deregulation of the financial system debt had increased, housing bubbles have occurred with power in the hands of those who own private property where income is earned from rent. In London with gentrification, displacement and homelessness, coupled with austerity, people have personally suffered. Paul Chatterton discusses the concept of the modern city:

... that every generation should return to - what actually is a city, what do we want to be and who should be involved in its making? (Chatterton, 2010: 234).

This discussion considers what a 'city' actually is. Is it for the people or, as seems to have occurred in London, does it serve the financial interests of the elite? In their informative article, Rowland Atkinson, Simon Parker and Roger Burrows (2017) examine the relationship between the elite, power and money. With global wealth, members of the elite are drawn to London, creating a new social division. This is reminiscent of Ruth Glass' use of the term 'gentrification' to describe the changes in inner London as the middle class took over areas of housing previously lived in by the working class (Glass, 1964).

## **1.7 London and Housing**

This section considers London's housing crisis and the building of resistance to change. Michael Edwards (2016) in writing about London's housing crisis argues that London has the fastest long-term growth of average housing prices in Europe. Yet the UK has the widest regional differences when it comes to house price growth and this is partly driven by financialisation (e.g. the buy to let market), rent accumulation and dispossession. In the past forty years of neoliberalisation, socially provided housing has been split between council housing and housing associations. The demand for socially rented property has grown, while private home ownership has been driven by successive governments. London is considered the 'World City' but in concentrating on the overall wealth, this has ignored the poverty of London residents and workers who are suffering as they are driven into the private sector market.

Inhabitants of London are frequently having to uproot themselves and relocate as they move between precarious private tenancies with limited legal rights. Many become homeless with

little or no help from the Welfare State that was originally created to protect the working class. In addition, families in receipt of benefits which have been restricted as a result of the Welfare Reform Act (WRA) 2012 along with the reduced building of social housing, were forced to move to other areas or out of London altogether.

Jacob Wills (2016) wrote about and organised, grass roots power from small groups such as The Radical Housing Network (RHN). The RHN is a group of independent groups searching for housing justice in London. Wills spoke about how to build power and how to use it once this existed. At the time of writing the aim was to build solidarity through sharing analysis, tactics and skills aiming to create the commitment to resist displacement. His interest came from his experience of squatting in South London in 2012. As resistance groups tend to be localised and very independent, it is hard to achieve the bigger goals associated with rent reduction, or the building of sufficient social housing. Furthermore, it is even more difficult to be recognised at a level where decisions are made. Wills considered that the way forward may be to form tenant unions with the purpose of providing continuity and a base for action.

One example, established in March 2015, was Architects for Social Housing (ASH) (2018). The aim of ASH was to respond architecturally to London's housing crisis. ASH ran an active Facebook page that shares information about what is occurring across London in terms of the housing crisis. The main focus was to offer advice and expertise to residents who feel their voices are not heard during the so-called regeneration process. This was undertaken at three levels to aid the resistance to gentrification of London that activists consider to be a form of social cleansing. Firstly, they propose workable alternatives to estate demolition that increases housing capacity, while leaving communities intact and avoiding decanting. In supporting estate communities, they provide information, knowledge and tactics pooled from similar events across London. Finally, by using information to counter negative statements made by those interested in redevelopment, they raise awareness of housing challenges. This is undertaken through talks, reports, exhibitions, films and case studies. ASH has been involved with Focus E15 in response to the 400 empty homes on The Carpenters Estate, Stratford, Newham. This is an area that changed dramatically due to the 2012 Olympic Games much of which has received publicity due to resistance.

Several academics have taken an interest in what has occurred in Stratford following the Olympics. Paul Watt of Birkbeck University has written significantly about the area and mothers such as his article about the mothers, *Homeless female lone parents in post-Olympics, austerity East London* (2018). While Doctors Kate Hardy and Tom Gillespie (2016) undertook a participatory action research project that considered homelessness, health and housing in Newham after attending the Open House protest in Stratford.

### **1.8 Stratford, Newham, East London**

The 2011 Census describes Stratford and New town as a ward in the borough of Newham including Stratford, Leytonstone, West Ham, Maryland, Stratford Village and Olympic Park. The population of Stratford and New town was 17,768 broken down to 48% female and 52% male. The average age is 31 with 43.6 % born in England and the top answers for country of birth after this are Bangladesh 5.0 %, India 4.7%, Nigeria 2.4%, Pakistan 2.1%, South America 1.9%, Ghana 1.5%, China 1.4%, Somalia 1.4% and Ireland 1.1%.

The changes brought about by the 2012 Olympics were changes to the housing and welfare claims of the people of this area are considered in this section. Ayshea Buksh (2012) reported on the BBC News that with London winning the Olympic bid, the Carpenters Estate

residents 'face uncertain future'. The Carpenters Estate in Stratford was set to be demolished with University College London looking to build a campus with accommodation in its place as part of the ongoing regeneration. There was no plan to rehouse the community or preserve existing social networks. In January 2013, the Mayor, Robin Wales promised that local people moved out could come back if they wanted, later admitting the Council would only do the best it could. The plans were rejected by the Carpenters Residents Steering Group stating as Newham has a serious housing crisis, this could not be ethical. The estate comprised a health centre, a convenience store, a pub, and two community centres - one with sporting facilities - and numerous resident-led events.

The resistance to moving people out of the area and preparing the estate for demolition was brought to public attention by a group of young mothers who became known as the Focus E15 campaign in September 2013. The campaign was named after the foyer they resided in and consisted of 210 units, mainly single person flats but some in a mother-and-baby-unit offering support. This support came in the form of training and employment and accommodated a mix of black and Asian minority ethnic (BAME) and white East Londoners from disadvantaged working-class backgrounds. The funding of £41,000 which had come from a Supporting People budget, was removed as a result of government austerity cuts. This resulted in the mothers being issued with eviction notices (Focus E15, 2020).

Donatella Della Porta (2017) stated austerity has presented political opportunities for mobilisation against contentious politics resulting in the emergence of new social movements growing from the failure of political parties. These movements respond to what is described by Della Porta and Mario Diani (2015) as not just a global economic crisis but how micro dynamics of collective action address political, non-political opportunities for social movements to grow such as opposing austerity on local communities. The policy of austerity in the UK is written about by David Cooper and Vickie Whyte (2017) who argue that austerity emerged from a statement given by the then opposition leader, David Cameron, in 2008.

Speaking at Bloomberg offices in London in 2008 The Guardian (2008) reported the opposition leader commenting on supporting re-capitalisation of the banks with tax-payers money staying. We supported that, but to be crystal clear the economic record of Labour has never been clearer to see. The economic assumptions that Labour's leader Gordon Brown made in the past ten years lie in ruins. The assumption that we could permanently spend more than our income and build an economy on debt and would abolish boom and bust are false.

Cooper and Whyte (2017) point out that this statement started the rhetoric from the Conservative Party surrounding the need to reduce the national debt and that austerity was the solution. No data has ever been produced to show that public debt is the fault of overspending governments in the UK. The Conservative governments of Thatcher and Major borrowed more than those of Labours' Blair and Brown. Furthermore, Cooper and Whyte argue that the cause of the global financial crisis is found in the neoliberal capitalism designed by the government where key people in the banking system took risks that failed. Rather than looking to the banks to solve this, the idea of 'togetherness' was promoted with those in receipt of welfare payments becoming the scapegoat for the crisis with reduced welfare payments occurring as a result.

Colin Crouch (2009) in his article stated the transformation after the Second World War from Keynesianism that provided support through the state to neoliberalism that brought in markets to provide services has barely been noticed. In January Miles Brignell (2019)

reported that as a result of austerity and stagnated wages, the average UK household had £15,400 of household debt owed to credit card firms, banks and other lenders. Living on credit has become the norm for low and middle income earners while the wealthy profit from investments. This can be seen as privatised Keynesianism resulting in individuals rather than the government taking on debt to stimulate the markets.

As a response to cuts to public spending, many protests occurred on the streets of the UK especially in London. These protests led to a rise in people on both the left and right of politics taking to the streets from the early 2000s. The UK population has recognised there is an alternative to globalization and neoliberal policies and are using public space and the internet to show their discontent towards what has occurred across the UK and throughout the world.

The rise of Focus E15 as a new social movement, based around housing issues, has expanded to deal with many issues of social injustices influenced by a relationship with the Revolutionary Communist Group (RCG). The RCG (2020) through their own definition are a Communist, Marxist and Leninist political organisation existing to defend and develop an anti-imperialist trend within Britain. The RCG consider the long-term interests are of the entire working class including those oppressed internationally of a society organised to meet the needs of the entire population. This includes the fullest possible development of every individual. In attending events around London hosted by the RCG such as talks by academics about housing through giving people the opportunity through hosting and sitting on a panel is how people are given the opportunity to develop personally in challenging Capitalism.

In considering Capitalism the work of Alice Drury and Mark Rankin (2012) regarding recent protests against social, political and economic inequalities the movements explanation that the inequality is global capitalism is incorrect. While Occupy movements using the tags such as the 99%, *the haves* and *haves not* and blaming capitalism for current inequalities is not justified. Worldwide a tiny percentage own most of the wealth and as capitalism has no philosophy or morality, this is not the problem. Capitalism is in fact the mechanics for a profit driven system characterised by free markets and with no government intervention into the economy.

Many Focus E15 protests are local to Newham such as reported by Cash Boyle (2020). He stated that a protest organised by Focus E15 involved a solidarity Chain of Power exposing the lack of state intervention on housing. Protesters linked the 1 kilometre between the temporary accommodation hostel Brimstone House (previously the Focus E15 Foyer) and the Carpenters Estate. The chosen points showed Brimstone House remains overcrowded while 400 homes have been empty on The Carpenters Estate for over 13 years. Rokhsana Fiaz, Mayor of Newham, admitted this situation had been going on far too long and all options remain on the table with a report due to cabinet at the end of the year. The distinct actions of this group involving a successful legal challenge in The Royal Court of Justice in 2018 (discussed in the next chapter) are critiqued by academics such as Professor Paul Watt (2016) in his seminal article *A Nomadic War Machine in the Metropolis*. This describes the distinctive actions of Focus E15 campaign often reported such as on RT News, and the local press in addition to posts on social media during all focus E15 actions.

### **1.9 The Nomadic War Machine**

Professor Paul Watts' (2016) paper builds on a call in the City for an 'assemblage urbanism' that maps London's 21<sup>st</sup> century housing crisis. The paper examines the Focus E15 housing campaign of a group of young mothers who lived in a supported housing hostel in the

borough of Newham but were threatened with eviction due to Government Welfare cuts under the Welfare Reform Act 2012. Through, Watts' participant observation the paper explains of how the campaign undertook a series of distinctive methods of housing politics in London.

The paper shows how the campaign has used one of the major methods of urban politics through temporary occupations. This relates to the terminology of *A Thousand Plateaus* by Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (2013) relating to urban nomads, occupying a smooth space and transforming a space in the city. This is the actions of nomadic occupiers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century urban social movements such as Occupy. Rather than the thousands, Focus E15 occupations are numbered in dozens and have become well known as the occupations resisted their initial displacement and their profile rose. At this point they commenced campaigning for the housing and urban rights of ordinary Londoners. Also, the campaign changed from Focus E15 mothers to the Focus E15 campaign reflecting their wider scope with the often-used slogan *Social housing, not social cleansing*.

The paper argues through creating a safe space and distinctive publicized actions rather than acting defensively as a 'nomadic war machine' gave rise to a high-profile reputation as inspirational campaigners who set their own rules. The Focus E15 campaign has, often used the tactics of undertaking the occupation of space further than Stratford Broadway where the Saturday stall is held. This has involved occupying empty homes, housing offices and holding vibrant marches resulting in the high-profile reputation of inspirational campaigners who don't know their place as they achieve outcomes.

This chapter has discussed the defined Focus E15 and how theories of old social movements became new social movements. Also, considering at the role of communication in the emergence of movements using space, the change in urban politics especially in London. The next chapter will discuss my methodology for undertaking this research.

## **CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Research Design**

Chapter 2 explains the focus of the research and the questions and how they arose and why a particular research method was selected. Through expanding to how the research was undertaken over a period of time of data gathering through observations and discussions at events and the street stall before the interviews take place. Why only a few people are selected for the interviews and how long these took although comments made in discussions with the core group and other people attending Focus E15 street stall, monthly meetings or actions are considered.

### **2.2 The focus and questions**

Leaving Stratford Station in late 2016 the initial observation of luxury flats, many of which appeared empty, next to an expensive shopping centre, contrasted with a local shopping mall and a very noticeable number of homeless people seemed unusual. On further investigation, after meeting a group of young mothers, the Focus E15 campaign, protesting against the actions of Newham Council, it was brought to my attention that there were 400 empty homes within a 5-minute walk of this location. Being regularly drawn back to the area from early 2017 to see why this situation had developed in an area that had received investment from the 2012 Olympics and in addition why people were highlighting what was now occurring was intriguing.

From attending the Focus E15 Saturday stall, monthly meetings and events and talking to those drawn to Focus E15 I was directed to relevant literature. People from other groups would appear at demonstrations this often occurred through being drawn to Focus E15 due to broadcasts of actions on social media. These relationships were often built as described in the work of Miladi (2016) when considering events in the middle east that led to change. This was how ASH (2018) became involved and jointly with Focus E15 presented an alternative idea for The Carpenters Estate to Newham Council. The big issue regarding the empty homes was a constant in the campaign and used at events yet never seemed to be totally unpacked as it is in the work of Duncan Bowie (2017). Possibly because the Welfare Reform Act (2012) has such a link to the issue of available affordable housing. This leads into my overall question are these actions a reaction to austerity as described by Cooper and Whyte (2017) in their book.

Colin Robson (2002) considers social science research to be complex and diverse with differing goals and assumptions. Through engagement with different people some of whom were becoming apparent as the ideas people within the campaign, identifying themselves at monthly meetings as part of the Focus E15 campaign, resulted in me establishing an idea of what influenced individuals. It was apparent the core group was very tight working, later through aiding the campaign and being briefly allowed into a planning meeting confirmed this to me.

After attending each event I would take time to write down notes from what I had observed and discussions that had taken place with individuals. In 2019 this information helped being aware as my time going to Stratford may be limited and some activists in their spare time may have difficulty to confirm times. During 2019 while attending an event on housing that Focus E15 were present at the running of a continuous tape on a loop of the actions undertaken by the group led me to the selection of questions. I was interested in what brought people to Focus E15, which action was an individual's favourite, what did they think with regards to the empty homes and if they considered the campaign a reaction to austerity.

Considering the research options and my previous engagement with the group qualitative research to include participant observation, ethnography and interviews was the most suitable method for my research. I was expecting the unstructured interviews would provide information that would be unknown to me. Consideration was given to interviewing other people drawn to the Focus E15 campaign but due to the nature of the campaign and the 2-hour time limit of Stratford Broadway this was considered not appropriate. Approaching Newham Council was briefly considered but having encountered the Council's response to Focus E15 personally. From attempting to end actions such as the Newham Nag protest to Councillors at time passing the Saturday stall, I suspected my Facebook profile that supported Focus E15 would be looked at as was believed were those of the Core Group along with the Focus E15 Facebook and Twitter accounts.

### **2.3 Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research, as stated by Judith Bell (2006), the aim is to understand people's perception of what is occurring and this information cannot easily be quantified. The data is usually obtained from observations or interviews which can be rich in quality. In terms of observation through undertaking a process described by Alan Bryman (2004) the researcher immerses himself into a group for an extended period, observing behaviour, listening to what is said between others and asks questions. This method also yields rich, in-depth information. In their seminal article Patrick McCurdy and Julie Uldham (2014) state this helps to generate insights into issues from the participants perspective.

Steinar Kvale (1996) states interviewing is an essential tool for the qualitative researcher, as a conversation/interview is a basic mode of human interaction. Through an interview we get to know about other people's experiences through posing question they will interact too. Although one disadvantage is due to time taken in undertaking and transcribing the interviews often results in only obtaining one view point. Qualitative research is a scientific method to gather non-numerical data using methods such as ethnography, participant observations and interviews, where the researcher can interact with those being studied. Christopher Pole and Richard Lampard (2002) state the importance is to collect good data so it can be analysed and added to the existing literature to explain a social phenomenon so the research has to be designed to meet these requirements. Having met the Focus E15 what made people from differing backgrounds spending at least every Saturday campaigning against the actions of Newham Council was a fairly unique situation that required understanding.

The ideal method to undertake this is qualitative research as it explores social interactions and can provide understanding into how people act in certain settings. The strength of this being it understands complex situations offering multiple methods of data collection that are usually cost efficient. Although on the negative side data collection can be time consuming and hard to analyse as the data is not easy to categorize although it plays a vital role in answering what we believe or doubt.

### **2.4 Ethnography & Participant Observation**

Ethnography is writing socially about a set group of people. Alpha Shah (2017) argues that this is a potentially revolutionary praxis as there is the potential to contribute new knowledge. In this case the opportunity to speak to a core group with obvious different backgrounds and obtain an insight into what brought them together in their weekends at other times to build this movement. Also, what from their specific interests they contribute to steering this movement. As engagement with people through participant observation constantly forces anthropologists, that is people who study societies and cultures and their development, to

question our ideas through engaging with others. The result is a profoundly political act enabling us to challenge hegemonic conceptions of the world, challenge authority and act progressively in the world.

Focus E15 Saturday stall and other events arranged by this movement are social constructions at a regional level as defined by Dewi Jaimangal-Jones (2014). Jaimangal-Jones, sees these types of events as social constructions and play a central role in the functioning of societies that are unique in their ability to transform spaces. The Focus E15 stall has turned an urban area into a safe space that at times is occupied by children where music is played, events such as Face painting occur. While activists engage with members of the public over themes of social injustice. In this space interviews and participant observation is undertaken the advantages of engaging are important as written about by Martin Hammersley and Paul Atkinson (1995). They argue to truly understand activists and how they engage we must learn by studying their behaviour in this case this was done from 2017.

From engaging with this group in Stratford through observation at different times it became apparent that a constant flow of different activists were supporting Focus E15 events. Over time it became apparent who the regular participants were with the monthly meetings showing who the main drivers of campaign ideas. Regular engagement with this group and having been accepted as somebody carrying out research into social movements has given me an insight into the personal views of the activists. Thought was given to the possibility of approaching Council officials to be interviewed. Although through having met Councillors when present in Stratford, being aware I had been photographed with the campaigners for use on social media and my use of social media I believed from not being from London I would not been given this permission although it was in my thoughts for possible future research.

Morris Schwartz and Charlotte Schwartz (1995) state that an observer's presence in a social situation is required for the purpose of scientific investigation. From building a face to face relationship with the observed and by participating through handing out leaflets and engaging with the public at the Saturday stall current data was gathered in a natural setting. Through engaging with academics and activists and campaigners at Focus E15 monthly meetings and events current academic research relevant to Stratford, social cleansing and the changes taking place was revealed. At the end of each day in Stratford I would review notes and literature received and log this so at a later date a reference point for information was established.

In studying social movements Patrick McCurdy and Julie Uldham (2013) argue that the research can be undertaken as an insider/outsider and overtly/covertly position. Undertaking research as an outsider can prove challenging to gain reliable data. Covert observation is controversial as it can lead to harming research subjects. One extreme case of this can be seen in the reporting of Kevin Blowe (2019) on decades of Police spying on black families such as the Lawrence's following the murder of their son Stephen in 1993. The harm the family felt will not be fully investigated until 2020 at the earliest. The consequence of covert observation can be the subjects feel harmed and their mental health and trust in people may be broken for ever. Also, any future credibility as a researcher can be lost.

This research trust has been built over time as the aim is to publish for a wider audience but a weakness in this could be assuming information is factual. Through being a regular participant observer, the question of objectivity and subjectivity needs to be considered. Gizem Oksuzoglu-Guven (2016) considers researchers are individuals in their own social world so assign their own meanings and so can never be truly objective. Although, when I

met this group, I was questioning why the group did not support Labour under Jeremy Corbyn. By observing what the area was suffering from, like much of inner London from Labour with regard to selling off of social housing I managed to keep off this subject. This helped me to gain access and resulted in being invited to attend meetings of wider interest arranged by the Revolutionary Communist Group by limiting this, I was able to remain objective. Having said that the relationship built with the group provides richer information about the interests of the campaign group which would not occur under more structured conditions. At the time undertaking a social and political degree the option to learn about politics in action added to my own political education. In order to gain a more detailed insight into individual opinions, interviews are required.

## **2.5 Interviews**

Through observations and interactions with the core people the opportunity to evaluate the input of each to the Core group and overall planning meant I was in a position to arrange interviews. Through using the work of Jaimangal-Jones (2014) where the ethnographic interview is primarily semi-structured gives the interviewer a conversation that can steer the interview to subject areas of interest during the protest. Also, rather than the role of 'ordinary participant' and making notes the opportunity to question around a specific interest meant interesting data that may not otherwise be discovered could be obtained.

To achieve a balanced sample of opinion from a small group of ten people that seemed to be influenced by the Revolutionary Communist Group to avoid what may lead to repetition of views, six people were carefully selected for interviews. As questions evolved from observing the core group, interests and skills from everyday life enabled a selection of interviewees to obtain this. With the group being politically driven an experienced view on political ideas was required as was the experience of mothers who had been the founders of the activism. With many events using the visibility of banners and insight into this was also required.

As the group was set up by young mothers although almost all were no longer active in Focus E15. I selected the mother of one of the original mothers and a mother drawn to the group due to her experience with Newham Council and Focus E15. As the RCG were prominent I selected the two people who appeared to be the driving force of Focus E15 and also two people with an artistic background. This was done through emailing the person who seemed to influence the group to arrange dates and times for interviews.

The first two interviews took place at what is considered the Focus E15 office where the equipment for the events is stored. The other interviews were arranged for the same day at the Saturday stall sitting on a bench within view of the other activists. The first interviews lasted for an hour and a half while the other four took around 20 to 30 minutes. With this group being very informal and drawing people from across London I had envisaged this so had a set of four questions that could be developed around specific interests of those participating.

Besides the question of what brought this group together with differing backgrounds from my observation, I needed to undertake interviews with open questions to enable me to probe individual influence on the campaign.

### **The questions**

The first question was, *How did you become involved in Focus E15*. Although I thought I had a good idea around the responses the answers opened up personal feelings from which I started to understand drove people to be active in the group. On interviewing A1 who was a

political person it was fascinating to listen to a discussion that was Festival Capitalism without giving this the changes in Stratford this name. On interviewing A4 I was shocked to discover it had been her idea for her daughter to approach the other mothers in the Focus E15 Hostel as I always understood this had been her daughter's idea.

While the first 2 interviews were quite relaxed due to being in a quiet office space the interviews on Stratford Broadway did become pragmatical due to the location with an interruption. Yet in interviewing A6, although the interview was cut short it gave the first real insight into the corruption, I had always had a brief understanding of that was involved in the Olympic bid. With the mention of corruption resulting into everybody on the street stall bursting into singing about this showed the true uniqueness of this group of committed activists with the interviews were recorded using a Sonocent App on a mobile phone. Testing had taken place at Sylvias Corner the office used by Focus E15 and on Stratford Broadway as I had expected some interviews may occur at this location.

## 2.6 Analysis

The data collected needs to undergo analysis as stated by Pole and Lampard (2002) to facilitate explanation and understanding of what is occurring in the social world. The data collected from other researchers and institutions, secondary analysis, may have explained how the subject for research was created and what has occurred to create the research. As Bryman (2004) writes access to secondary data saves resources in carrying out a data collection exercise yourself although there is no control over the quality of this data. While through undertaking participant observation you have this control.

In this case many hours since 2016 have been spent at the street stall, monthly meetings and actions arranged by Focus E15 especially during 2017 when I had time to regularly be in London. In addition to identifying who would be the best people to be interviewed as people's individual interest outside of the group became known to me. I was directed to more data to be analysed through meeting activists and academics during my visits. Kvale (1996) stated, too much data from qualitative interviews is hard to work with, the focus needs to be on quality not quantity. In this case by selecting four questions from the commencement of the campaign to the current day with participants from varying backgrounds quality data should be forthcoming.

Through realising questioning committed activists I expected much data would be forthcoming the obvious analytical process to me was to look for similar words and phrases. Through identifying those most commonly used established the words and themes that were important. This was done through looking at the transcriptions and then highlighting repetitions. Through then counting these the most common words or related themes emerged. Deciding this was to be my coding process I had set up the interviews with people from varying backgrounds and limited the amount of questions to simplify this process.

In this case I have collected data around a general theory through ethnography that Kathy Charmaz (2014) states requires sustained participation, observation and informal conversations in the social world of subjects that is backed up by supplementary data. Charmaz considers in this process ideas are refined rather than increasing sample size and is theoretical sampling a defining property of grounded theory. Time spent observing Focus E15 involved changing theories of what was occurring at various events. Besides how people became involved in the protest which I was aware would give me a variety of replies I was able to evaluate responses to questions around favourite actions, the empty homes and if this was a reaction to austerity by comparing the responses. The overall examination of this provides an answer to the general research question.

#### 4.7 Ethical considerations and Validity

David Silverman (2017) states that due to abuse of research subjects over the years has led to an establishment of codes of research ethics. The ethics are about the protection of participants, assessment of benefits and any potential risks or harm through participation and providing consent. As considered by Edward Diener and Rick Crandall (1978) the research has passed Oxford Brookes University ethics committee. In the case of Focus E15 core group each participant signed a consent form that they were happy to undertake this research in line with Oxford Brookes University. This includes they have read and understood an information sheet regarding this research, participation is voluntary and they are happy to take part in a recorded interview and any quotes will be anonymous.

As I had observed the members of Focus E15 I was asking myself many questions around various themes from what brought these people from across London to East London to challenge what I had observed was a reaction to austerity. With qualitative data being subjective and the information is unquantifiable through using limited semi structured interviews coding set words appeared the obvious method to use. This eliminated the need to use computer analysis such as NVivo that supports qualitative and mixed methods research and as the interviewer I felt gave me a better insight into the subjects. With more time and better access to the core group and others attending Focus E15 events I would have broadened out my questions and taken in the observations and thoughts of those who are not part of the core group. I would also have asked the question as to what people thought was the solution to what had occurred in Stratford and possibly wider Newham.

The writing of Norris (1997) in regardless to bias and validity of research of Education Action Research is taken as many of the events around the activities of Focus E15 have been personally observed or repeated by respected members of the core group so are believed to be honest accounts of what occurred.

Interview time and location were out of my control although they were conducted with people I had regularly engaged with for some time. The first 2 interviews were a little more formal than the interviews undertaken on Stratford Broadway that at times included engaging with activities on the street stall. The first interviews were of quite a political nature where Newham were identified as what to some degree could be called an enemy. While the interviews on Stratford Broadway were more relaxed. Due to the uncertainty of what responses would be forthcoming the questions were very specific where extra information could be drawn out and through recording could be revisited for calcification about Focus E15.

As I was taken more into their confidence it became apparent the drive of Focus E15 was coming from the political education of the RCG (2020). Although again like austerity the driver of this, neoliberalism as critiqued by Harvey (2007) was barely mentioned. Although during interviews people did talk in relation of what Giulianotti et al. (2014) calls Festival Capitalism. The differing backgrounds of the core group and what they brought to the campaign was becoming more significant especially in relation to Art in relation to the work of Milbrandt (2010). Bold statements at protests on banners go further than the local area being broadcast to the world through social media by the thousands who follow Focus E15 (2020) posts and updates.

The focus of my research finally settled on the question was Focus E15 a reaction to austerity or something bigger, giving the opportunity for interviewees to discuss their views around topics relating what possibly brought people to the campaign. The campaign group have used academics, playwrights and artists to promote the causes of the campaign with

the aim of spreading their activism as wide as possible. This has resulted in people being more than willing to have their opinions and thoughts heard by the widest possible audience. The relationship with the group had built from being aware how the group became known to me giving the option for further publicity and the chance to exchange ideas from differing perspectives and share academic and current literature.

This section has focused on how the research was carried out and why qualitative approaches were used to obtain information how this was analysed making sure ethical considerations were undertaken and the next chapter considers the Focus E15 campaign.

## CHAPTER 3 FOCUS E15

### 3.1 Focus E15 Campaign

This chapter establishes the birth of Focus E15 and through participant observation distinctive actions and victories are discussed before considering housing and specifically what is occurring in Stratford, Newham. The Focus E15 (2020) campaign was born in September 2013, when a group of young mothers were served with eviction notices due to the ending of funding for the Focus E15 hostel that housed them. The young mothers met the Revolutionary Communist Group (2020) when obtaining signatures to support their campaign to stay in Stratford after the Mayor Sir Robin Wales had told them this was not possible as they were not in work. Through meeting the RCG (2020) who are an organisation that are described as existing in order to defend and develop an anti-imperialist trend within Britain to defend the interests of the working class in Britain and those oppressed across the world formed a new campaign group. By establishing a regular presence on the streets of an urban area, Stratford in East London the group formed a visible campaign open to local people to undertake actions. The Focus E15 (2020) campaign undertakes actions in a very distinctive way described as *A nomadic war machine in the metropolis*.

### 3.2 Participant Observations

Having been present at a lecture given by one of the Focus E15 support group it became apparent this group acted outside of accepted methods of protest, as this group would more than just protest. At times they would descend on a target en masse and at times undertake an occupation of a building meeting a definition of a new Social Movement. This definition is taken from Diani (1992) as a group of people brought together from across London. As Buechler (1995) set out this group has established an identity through defining its interests that are against government and local authority actions affecting the lives of individuals challenged through having a collective of people.

From first visiting this group on Stratford Broadway in 2016 and more regularly from the spring and summer of 2017 as a relationship was developed with the core group. I commenced observing the *Nomadic War Machine* in action, each event would last at least half a day. From becoming aware of the Focus E15 campaign the interest grew to being involved in participant observation from 2017 to the current day and becoming accepted as a researcher as part of my academic work of what was occurring. Some of the most relevant observations relate to Stratford and Newham and are set out below.

#### **Newhamnag 20<sup>th</sup> May 2017**

The Newhamnag was the first Focus E15 direct action where I became aware of the Nomadic war Machine as the Focus E15 actions were described by Watt (2016). Having attended an event organised by Focus E15 the previous week in the cinema at Stratford attended by around 60 people in a cinema bar area to hear a talk with input from Jasmin one of the original Focus E15 mothers and another mother who had been given an eviction notice I had been informed of this action and the Bridge House actions. On arriving I was amazed by the amount of people present with many in fancy dress and how this appeared a co-ordinated well-planned event. As I became more involved in the actions of 2017, I realised how the events were set up using social media to advertise and record actions and how numbers were increased through attendance of other active groups such as the RCG (2020) and Debt Resistance UK (2020).

A spoof publication of a Newham Council publication, *thenewhamnag*, was given out to people by members of the Focus E15 campaign and Debt Resistance UK. Following research into council funding, this protest started to make people aware that Newham Council had taken out a Lobo Loan, resulting in 80 pence of every pound of Council tax servicing the interest of this loan. The protest originally started at Stratford Bus Station but was moved by enforcement officers due to this space being private space although it was presumed a bus station was part of urban public space. On moving to Stratford Station railway terminus, the protest was threatened with a little-known legal document S137 of the Highways Act but this was not acted upon after negotiation. The protest was attended by around 40 people including seasoned activists, students and academics and also joined by passers-by. As people passed through the public space in front of the station, they engaged with the group one of whom was dressed up as Emily Pankhurst, a leading suffragette. Banners had been put up in the area and people made speeches regarding Newham Council. At the same time, people were offered the spoof publication, *The Newhamnag*.

The issue of funding cuts to local authorities and Newham Council obtaining a Lobo Loan for this shortfall can be seen as part of framing. The work of Daellenbach and Parkinson (2016) view this as a social movement framing the actions of Newham Council in obtaining a loan as not being a social benefit as the charges to service this comes from Council Tax. The action regarding the payments expose this little-known fact. This had been researched by Debt Resistance UK and without this and the publication of facts residents of Newham would be unaware. Using a demonstration to high lite this resulted in Newham Council renegotiating this loan which is a small victory for Focus E15 (Newham Council, 2019).

### **Bridge House Housing Office 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2017**

At mid-day, around 40 activists including people from organisations such as The Movement for Justice assembled outside the Housing Office. The aim of these activists was to show solidarity with the young mother potentially being offered accommodation outside of London. This protest was loud and vibrant with banners, speeches and songs. The shutters were pulled down of what is presumed to be an open housing office as it went into lock down. People with appointments had to speak to security guards through a small gap and were told to return at another time. One of the prominent campaigners of Focus E15 was contacted via the phone offering an appointment for the concerned mother in East Ham Housing Office that day. After discussion, this offer was refused and an appointment was made for the next day. At this appointment, the young mother was supported while posts were put on social media advising people to attend the property where the young mother was currently living to prevent her being moved out of the borough. At a meeting the next day the young mother, supported by a Focus E15 campaigner, was offered a property in Newham.

The policy of Newham Council using the Welfare Reform Act 2012 and out of borough placements can be seen to be successfully challenged through using solidarity and social media. As Lefebvre (1991) stated this shows people organising in an area where the lives of some are controlled from an office the lived experience of individuals can be influenced by solidarity.

### **March of Towers 12<sup>th</sup> August 2017**

The March of Towers commenced from Ferrier Point, passing Tanner Point in Plaistow before ending at The Carpenters Estate, Stratford where there are around 400 empty homes. In these 3 Tower blocks there were residents refusing to leave despite the Grenfell tragedy so security/safety officers had been put on duty 24 hours a day. The march highlighted safety concerns following the Grenfell Tragedy with about 120 people marching

to loud music, distributing leaflets to people that were en route, stopping for speeches at points of interest, such as the original Focus E15 hostel and ending with a BBQ on The Carpenters Estate.

The march was a response of working-class residents of Tower Blocks who for years had felt the upkeep and safety of their homes was not to the standard required. Similarly, the residents of Grenfell Tower had also felt that their concerns surrounding safety had not been listened to. Currently, as the Grenfell enquiry reaches its 2<sup>nd</sup> stage, Robert Booth (2020) reported it was said by Grenfell survivors that they were 'genuinely shocked at corporates seeking to defend the indefensible' when concerns over safety had been raised. In addition, survivors commented that the corporations 'All have blood on their hands'. Furthermore, the corporate companies involved in the refurbishment of Grenfell were described by a legal counsel as under taking a 'merry-go-round of buck passing'. This case is ongoing and shows working class people feel they are badly treated by people in a position of authority. Sir Robin Wales, ex-Mayor of Newham was considered to be such a person as the vibrant event was broadcast across social media.

Using social media is how Nouredine Miladi (2016) considered social change was brought about in the Middle East through staging an event attended by over 100 people, including tenants' groups from Tower blocks, members of the RCG, academics. Throughout the march pictures and relevant points such as the original Focus E15 Hostel were posted on Facebook. The internet connects communities and creates social networks across movements creating a vibrant space for political campaigning, often used by marginalized communities. For example, Focus E15 created a link with those campaigning about Grenfell. The Grenfell tragedy that it is suggested was due to cost cutting possibly around austerity. Della Porta (2017) indicated this presented the opportunity to mobilise against contentious events. As political parties can be seen to have failed this is a recruiting opportunity for social movements to use framing which has always been the case with the Mayor of Newham and Newham Council being regular targets for the Focus E15 campaign.

### **Rokshana Fiaz 10<sup>th</sup> March 2018**

During Focus E15 Saturday events, songs are sung about Robin Wales and Newham Council. During the March monthly meeting it was discussed that the prospective candidate to become the new Mayor held surgeries at East Ham Library so plans were drawn up for a mobilisation of the Nomadic War Machine to attend this. So, on the 10<sup>th</sup> March 2018 the campaign group met at the East Ham Library where Rokshana Fiaz was pictured receiving the Newham People's Charter.

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## **NEWHAM PEOPLE'S CHARTER**

### **1 REPOPULATING CARPENTERS ESTATE**

Repopulate the Carpenters Estate in Stratford with 100% social housing.

### **2 ENDING SOCIAL CLEANSING**

Ending the heartless dispersal of homeless families outside of London hundreds of miles away from their support networks in Newham.

### **3 OPENING EMPTY HOMES**

Using all possible empty housing in the borough for accommodating people in need.

#### 4 SUSTAINABLE HOUSING POLICY

Commitment to a sustainable housing policy and a council housing building programme.

#### 5 END RACIST IMMIGRATION RAIDS

Ending further collaboration by council staff with Home Office Immigration Enforcement in harassing and detaining homeless people which simply pushes vulnerable people even further to the margins.

#### 6 LOCAL REFERENDUMS ON REGENERATION

Guaranteeing any further 'regeneration' project in Newham is subject to a binding referendum of local people.

#### 7 FINANCIAL MISMANAGEMENT INVESTIGATION

Holding an independent external investigation into all Newham council investment decisions over the last 16 years, including LOBO loans and the London stadium.

#### 8 NO ARMS FAIR IN NEWHAM

Publicly condemn and oppose any return to the DSEI arms fair in 2019 to a borough with so many residents adversely affected by war and the consequences of the global arms trade.

#### 9 MAYORAL SYSTEM REFERENDUM

Holding a referendum on abolishing the directly elected Mayor and Cabinet system.

#### 10 INVESTING IN THE COMMUNITY

Investing in community projects that understand youth crime invariably stems from a sense of insecurity and that what young people need is hope, rather than the constant fear of indiscriminate, draconian and racially profiled stop and search by the police. (Focus E15, 2020).

Following this event, the group returned to Stratford where another action of the *Nomadic War Machine* was planned as the general feeling had been growing that Robin Wales may be defeated in his election campaign. An open top bus was booked to tour around the borough if he was defeated.

#### **Sir Robin Wales, Mayor of Newham 17<sup>th</sup> March 2018**

Sir Robin Wales has been a target/frame for the Focus E15 (2020) campaign since the first meeting with the young mothers where he declared, 'If you can't afford to live in Newham, you can't afford to live in Newham'. During Focus E15 Saturday events, songs are sung about Robin Wales and Newham Council as part of framing them as the cause of problems.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> March the bus arrived before the end of the Saturday stall and was quickly decorated with banners regarding what the campaign saw as the failings of Robin Wales' time as Mayor. As the open top bus set off, snow fell, pictures were posted on social media as the bus toured the borough pointing out significant places. As the bus passed through areas of shoppers many people stood and stared, taking photographs and giving the thumbs up sign.

While these events were occurring, a growing homeless problem in Stratford was becoming a national story. The Stratford Centre, a warm dry place, was being used by around 100 homeless people a night to bed down. In her newspaper article Rachael Burford, of the

*Newham Recorder* (2019) reported that this was public right of way and it could not be closed during the night. One person interviewed, who did not give his name, said prison was looking like a good option having been living like this for six months since splitting with his partner. Despite the large number of people and relative safety there was drug taking and gangs coming in at night who robbed these people.

Rachel Burford (2019) reported Shelter's statistics of 1 in 25 people in Newham as homeless - the highest proportion in the UK. Since austerity had commenced from 2010; 1,300 people have been added to the Newham homeless register. In 2015, a local person, Lorraine Tabone, set up Lola's Homeless group. Every Wednesday volunteers hand out food and sleeping bags, all funded by donations. As recently as 4 years ago there were a couple of dozen people, mostly from eastern Europe sleeping in the centre, now a large percentage are Londoners. One person was suffering from a nervous breakdown after four years of sleeping on the streets and buses and had been living in a Hostel for 3 years. She could not afford the £1,000 a month deposit for private rent plus agency fees.

After the previous administration actions had been called into question by various groups such as Lola's and Focus E15 through using social media and websites the new Mayor of Newham Rokhsana Fiaz finally stated she would prioritise the issue of the empty 400 homes. However, Newham Council did not change their working methods. One of the most contentious being the frequently made decision of being intentionally homeless and being forced out of borough although Focus E15 will use the power to support individuals who feel they have no voice.

### **Social Cleansing Focus E15 Campaigner Wins 26th July 2018**

The Focus E15 (2020) campaign has consistently raised the issue of intentional homelessness and other related policies of Newham Council under the leadership of Sir Robin Wales. The campaign had been supporting Sara Abdalla, regarding her homeless case, for over six months and the new Mayor, Rokhsana Fiaz, had also offered her support to Sara prior to defeating Robin Wales in the local elections. Sara had an impending hearing at the Royal Courts of Justice to decide if she could appeal Newham's decision outside of the set timescale. With no updates from the Mayor, the Nomadic War Machine decided to take action along with other local residents concerned about ongoing housing issues with Newham Council.

At the planning it was agreed that on the 14<sup>th</sup> July 2018, the Street stall would set up on Stratford Broadway while others would go to Rokhsana Fiaz surgery at East Ham Library. The group included campaigners, residents from Brimstone House in Stratford, residents from Ferrier Point, Canning Town and local families facing eviction. A collective meeting with Rokhsana and Councillor Susan Masters took place who were updated about the dehumanising conditions and prison like security at Brimstone House, the original Focus E15 hostel. They were also informed about the ongoing battle against intentional homelessness, the inadequate housing provision for people with disabilities and children, the horror of bailiffs and the treatment people suffered at council housing offices. Rokhsana said she would instruct her staff to follow these complaints urgently and that councillors would meet residents to listen to their problems. When the empty houses on the Carpenters Estate were mentioned she promised by the Autumn to meet Carpenters residents and others with updates and plans. Unlike the previous Mayor, Robin Wales, who at times would close meetings where Focus E15 were present, Rokhsana had listened and promised action.

On Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> July 2018, in supporting Sara in court, the Nomadic War Machine descended on the Royal Courts of Justice. The group split with some supporting Sara in

Court while the rest of the group remained outside, engaging with passers by some of whom showed support through giving donations. Whilst waiting for updates inside the court, speeches were made and songs sang as leaflets were distributed to passers-by. During this time with a photographer from RTnews present, one of the group kept in contact with a friend in RTnews main office in order to update them on the hearing. When the news came that Sara had won the right to appeal: the decision of being found intentionally homeless, it was arranged for Sara and Jasmin, one of the original Focus E15 mothers, to be interviewed that night on RTnews at 7 p.m.

In addition to being on RTnews, the day's events were posted on social media, the next day the case was also reported by Rhiannon Long (2018) in the *Newham Recorder*. While a Council spokesperson posted the following on the Newham Council Website:

Sara Abdalla, 30, rejected an offer from Newham Council to move her to Birmingham, which would have seen her forced to quit her job and uproot her son from school. Because she rejected the offer, the council made her intentionally homeless. Sara appealed the decision twice, but was rejected, firstly because she didn't have enough information about her employment, and then because the appeal was too late. At London County..., Sara won the right to appeal the decision.

With the case being continually highlighted to Newham Council for over six months. It appears that, despite a new Mayor of Newham, the Council is still following previous agendas of moving people out of London without individual circumstances being accounted for. The Council, through closing rent accounts, as in Sara's case, made it impossible for people to clear rent arrears thus strengthening the Council's position. What this coverage had achieved was to obtain a response from Newham Council on July 27<sup>th</sup>; their website included the following:

Although Sara's case was subject to a formal statutory review decision, Mayor Rokhsana Fiaz asked for a further urgent investigation into the circumstances which resulted in front page news of the *Newham Recorder* as reported by Rhiannon Long (2018). With a response from Newham Council posting the following response on their website:

We have carefully considered Sara's representations and as a result we will conduct an informal review. We will consider any new information and change of circumstances. With almost 5,000 households in temporary accommodation, we are forced to make difficult decisions, compounded by Government policies and welfare cuts. The Mayor has also asked for a review of our whole approach to housing allocations, which is compounded by the dearth of suitable affordable accommodation here and throughout London. Councillor John Gray, Cabinet member for housing services, has already announced at Overview Committee on 24 July that the entire housing allocations policy will be looked at, including the suitability of offers made to homeless families (Newham Council, 2018).

Sara had a case review that Newham put down to a change of circumstances and offered Sara a property in Newham. The ability of the Focus E15 campaign through using social media and open events to attract people to a cause shows how government policy of austerity creating these conditions can be successfully challenged at a micro level. In addition to these high-profile events the feelings towards Newham Council were revealed in participatory research carried out by Dr Kate Hardy and Tom Gillespie supported by members of the Focus E15 campaign.

### **3.3 Focus E15 Participatory Research in Newham**

The need for Newham Council to change its working practices is revealed in results of Participatory Research between September 2015 and April 2016 undertaken by 2 academics who attended the open House during the occupation. The research carried out by Dr Kate Hardy, Dr Tom Gillespie and Focus E15 campaigners was regarding Homelessness, health and housing in Newham (2016). The aim was to undertake research to examine the experiences of those facing potential or actual homelessness in Newham. The document was based on 64 structured interviews with participants who were leaving housing offices in Bridge House, Stratford and East Ham.

The findings from this included 81% identified as having been homeless in the last five years with 53% currently homeless with eviction being the experience of 73%. Many of the evictions were as a result of the Benefit Cap (Gov.uk, 2017) that restricted the amount of benefits that could be claimed so making the cost of housing unaffordable. A significant proportion had health conditions with 22% having a registered disability and 48% a health condition that affected their housing need. The insecurity of their housing situation and possible displacement resulted in 89% mentioning worsening mental health issues. This resulted in a response from a British-Bangladeshi *I ... spoke with my housing officer, about the situation I can't sleep properly but...told me 'we consider this room suitable for you'... I told the officer, look this is a one bed place for a single person not for a family... My daughter, most of the time is just depressed- there is no playing area. She's crying most of the time.* Another 18-year-old White British woman who had part time work and was sofa surfing on visiting Newham Council said *... they had no place for me to stay because I'm not pregnant, mentally ill or elderly... I asked for B&B they refused. I said I was 18 and would be sleeping on park benches. They said because I'm 18 they can't do anything, if I went five days ago, I would have got help. I was 18 5 days ago.*

The findings reflected extremely high levels of hidden homelessness; serious physical and mental health issues arising or being exacerbated as a result of insecure housing, and an apparently systemic attempt to remove vulnerable people from the borough. These are the experiences people are still talking to Focus E15 campaigners in 2020 on the street stall.

The policy recommendations of the report have been the base of what the Focus E15 campaign have called for ever since. Firstly, ending the practice of out of borough placements especially as the research revealed the detrimental social, economic and health impacts on individuals and families. Secondly a call to undertake equalities impact assessments due to the disproportionate effect on women. Thirdly home seekers to take advocates to housing meeting and all meeting between the council and residents to be recorded. Finally, to consider people facing eviction due to the risk to their mental health to be offered immediate referrals for services with access to counselling. What is occurring can be traced back to the Housing Crisis in London.

### **3.4 Housing Crisis and London**

In his seminal paper Simon Wharne (2015) sets out homelessness as a politically contentious matter with any research struggling to obtain a balanced approach. Although many factors are involved, homelessness is a result of society not dealing with a housing shortage so the term intentional homelessness was possibly created to imply that this is an individual's choice. Addressing the issue of UK housing provision, Kate Barker (2014) who led the last major review of housing supply just over a decade before, found that although controversial, the UK needed to build more homes. Political parties now accept this is one solution but there is no agreement on the type of homes and this is particularly the case with London.

In his article 'The housing crisis and London', Michael Edwards (2016) considers what has occurred in three or four decades is a change from Keynesian to neoliberal political ideology that has resulted in the provision of council housing provision being eroded. As housing need has grown, the housing provision has been based on markets that have inflated land prices leading to personal affordability issues in obtaining housing. As Edwards (2016) sets out, the housing system is dominated by ownership of dwellings as financial assets that have developed into private landlordism as new social housing construction has almost halted. This is partly due to the increase in land values and the ability to build expensive homes that can achieve high rents by those owning the land.

The ownership of private land in the UK is held mainly by royal and aristocratic holdings, and by ancient universities and livery companies. As Kevin Cahill (2001) stated it is extremely difficult to identify who owns land, a study found it is known just 189,000 families own two-thirds of the UK's 60 million acres, of which nearly three-quarters is owned by just 40,000. In recent times with financial institutions and developers owning land in cities such as London with real incomes falling, expectations of becoming a homeowner are falling. Access to social housing has fallen due to a reduction in the building of this kind of housing. The alternative is private rented property (PRS) that has attracted investors who then rent this insecure housing to those in need. So, the housing market is failing to meet society's needs, and is often described as 'broken', a term that is used 100 times by Shelter (2014) in a housing report. While the country needs secure, reasonably priced housing much of the population is having to use insecure private rented housing while individuals and institutions profit from renting out properties as more people come to work in London.

As Michael Edwards (2016) stated London expanded in the new millennium in terms of migration, domestic and international and economic activity. Houses prices fell by 15% following the 2007/8 financial crash, but they recovered by 2011 as employment expanded faster than expected. Economic geographer Ian Gordon (2011) deduced this was due to a programme of public sector expansion protecting senior professional jobs and the government bailout of banks prior to austerity. But this resulted in low skilled indigenous workers, and working migrants, suffering increased in-work poverty.

As this has occurred, workers and households have become dependent on credit to maintain a decent living standard. This, in part, has produced the housing issues we see today. Traditional working-class employment such as coal mining, the docks and factories has ceased to exist and homes previously occupied by the working-class communities are now being privately rented - often to immigrant families - and so they are forced to move to other areas to live and work. The people who remain at times feel resentment towards the newcomers causing further tensions in communities. The tensions that exist in these communities are further exacerbated by media influence. A recent headline in the Mail Online (2020) *Revealed: How 500,000 immigrants have been given social housing in last decade as number of families on waiting list hits record high* gives the impression that immigrants are given social housing funded by taxpayers in priority over the working class. Housing allocations are, in fact, based on the following priorities; if you are homeless or fleeing violence, live in overcrowded or very bad housing conditions, need to move because of a health problem or disability with certain conditions such as age.

A further example causing tension was reported in the Daily Mail by Martin Beckford (2016) where it was said that the EU migrant welfare bill is £886 million made up of Jobseeker's Allowance, Housing Benefit and sickness pay in 2013-14, indicating that immigrants do not come here to work but to obtain free housing and benefits. In contrast, Dawn Foster (2016) in her article states that immigrants are not obtaining housing as claimed and that demand

for housing is much lower. Foster's article was written in response to a speech by Theresa May in December 2012 which claimed that immigration was causing the demand of a third of new housing which was based on a misrepresentation of a report by the London School of Economics. However, this report makes plain the fact that migrants tend to form fewer households than current populations and live in higher density homes in the private rented sector. Effectively, May was continuing to blame mass migration for the housing crisis despite the fact migrants place little demand on housing and often work in the NHS or low paid care work.

Overall, the housing crisis has resulted from a number of factors. Firstly, there has been a significant decline in the building of social housing since 2014. Added to this, there has been little change in levels of pay for low paid workers in London whilst at the same time, housing costs have increased greatly. This has resulted in local people having to move away from the communities that they can no longer afford to live in. This is further driven by the Welfare Reforms which have meant that the low paid have moved out to less expensive areas of London or other areas of the UK. Arguably this process could be described as a form of social cleansing.

### **3.5 Affordable Housing**

The term 'Affordable Housing' was created in 2011 possibly to try to cope with the lack of social housing to rent. While areas such as Newham became gentrified, the traditional working class were forced to relocate to more affordable areas. The Conservative-Lib Dem coalition government 2010 created the idea of affordable housing for sale or rent in 2011. For example, rents were set out at 80% of the locally prevailing market rents, which took away the prospect of everyday working people being able to afford these homes (Wilson and Bate, 2015). The growth of inequality has meant the middle- and low-income groups could not compete for housing while the introduction of The Welfare Reform Act (2012) resulted in vulnerable people and those who relied on benefits to help pay their rent also being forced to move. Furthermore, the introduction of housing caps resulted in Local Authorities such as Newham removing people from the borough to cheaper areas for housing as the value of the built environment mushroomed achieving massive capital gains (rents). In 2018 The Tenants Voice (2018) reported evictions had increased 53% in the 10 years prior to 2015. The record high in evictions meant 170 tenants a day were being evicted every day due to welfare cuts and the inability to pay rent. Of these 19,093 were from socially rented properties and 5,919 from the private rented sector.

London residents, many in work, were having to claim benefits to assist with housing costs and soon started to accrue housing arrears. Local authorities commonly used the term 'intentionally homeless' to refer to those residents in rent arrears who they evict. Consequently, the LA had no duty to support these families. In his article, Hal Pawson (2008) explains that the policy in England is different to other European countries as Local Authorities in England play a role in developing and delivering housing policy. A starting point of this can be seen as the Housing Homeless Person Act 1977 where local authorities had a legal duty to assist people threatened by homelessness, whereas the 2002 Homeless Act encouraged local authorities to devise and use homelessness prevention strategies rather than enact their legal duty. Council housing advisers explain how difficult it is to secure a priority need and Social Housing tenancy. Therefore, this has encouraged people who were possibly owed a legal duty to accept a private tenancy and has reduced the pressure on local authorities to provide social housing.

Asking people to accept a private tenancy is not the same as giving people a genuine informed choice and a situation that could potentially be legally challenged. However, with people accepting such a tenancy, it means that national homeless figures can be reduced for political purposes. Newham Council in London where the Focus E15 campaign originated, attempted to remove families from the local area as their method of dealing with the housing crisis yet after investment for the 2012 Olympic games why are there 400 empty homes while others on the estate are in daily use and some of the empty properties are used for filming.

### **3.6 Newham**

In Newham, Caritas Anchor House (2019) who provides homelessness support on the 20<sup>th</sup> June 2019, released the following Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) figures. These showed an 18% rise in rough sleeping in London, a staggering 8,855 people. While those published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, indicated there had been a 2% decrease in rough sleeping across England. Yet CHAIN is a multi-agency effort commissioned and funded by the Mayor of London which as part of its role identifies rough sleepers where they bed down for the night.

In Newham the last count of people sleeping rough was 615 people seen in the borough by Caritas. Looking more deeply into statistics in 2017/18 for Newham Local Authority: 1,949 people approached the council for homelessness assistance; 1,206 were accepted as homeless, 189 were recorded as intentionally homeless. In London the highest rate of homelessness was in Newham where 1 in 25 people were homeless; the highest level of overcrowding in the UK with around 25% of the boroughs 100,000 households in this position; the highest increase in house prices in the UK; 3515 people had been on a housing waiting list for 10 years, the highest in the UK; 4,500 people in temporary accommodation, the highest in London; the highest number of people, 1,700 placed outside the borough and, rent had increased in the last six years by 47.4% (Caritas Anchor House, 2019).

Sian Berry in her role with the Mayor of London and London Assembly (2018) reported the following figures that showed the first net drop in social housing since 2014. There has been a net loss of 3,620 council homes between 2016 and 2017 according to the Government's annual update on housing stock for London. For the first time new homes did not replace those demolished or bought under 'right to buy' with Housing Associations building just 1,910 homes a net loss of 1,710 of social housing stock was the result. One way of considering social housing is addressed by Suzanne Fitzpatrick and Beth Watts (2017), who discusses how this has changed from a permanent safety net to a temporary ambulance service. As Social housing provision in the UK has changed from homes for workers as a step up from private homes to become from the 1970s housing to accommodate poorer or disadvantaged people. As needs-based housing allocation became a priority more people in receipt of welfare benefits occupied this housing.

In Newham where rents charged outstrip wage growth and as reported by Patrick Collinson (2019) Newham has the steepest house price rises of the past 100 years. On investigating the possibility of obtaining private rented accommodation I considered advertisements for rooms or houses in newsagents' windows. On ringing these numbers with many advertisements very brief details and no rents under £100 a week the minute I mentioned the word I was in receipt of benefits the phone was cut off. In Stratford where there is a need for social housing to house established east end families, working people who are also in receipt of benefits or are homeless and this responsibility lies with Newham Council. Yet with 400 homes standing empty on the local Carpenters Estate people are moved out of London. With

promises made to local people about investment for the future with the 2012 Olympic Games is what has occurred a local or national issue.

The Chapter discussed how Focus E15 emerged the distinct actions of the Nomadic War Machine through participant observation. The demands this group put on the Mayor of Newham and how this can be partly considered to have been caused by the Housing Crisis and the effect on Newham. I will now consider specifically what has occurred in Newham as the UK has undergone socioeconomic change.

## CHAPTER 4 A CHANGING UK

### 4.1 Austerity and Neoliberalism

Chapter 4 shows how government policies used to reform the Welfare State backed by commercial opportunity to change the demographic of an area is part of change occurring in the UK. Austerity has a long history; the banking crisis of 2008 managed to move the crisis from the private to public sector through transferring the banking crisis to a fiscal crisis centred on government debt. A crisis caused in the banking and financial centres in the USA and UK had moved from an economic problem to a political problem based on neoliberal ideology in the UK as stated by David Harvey (2007) in writing his book *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.

In his article, Mike Berry (2015) considers the sustainability of neoliberal finance capitalism. The financial crisis came to the notice of the public on the 15<sup>th</sup> September 2008 when Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy. Over the next eight weeks major financial institutions across the developed world were also saved through state intervention. The British banking system came within hours of collapse on the 13<sup>th</sup> October 2008 before it was stabilised by a government bailout. What had occurred was that the success of a neoliberal economic approach partly caused by creating private consumer debt could be considered to have failed as an economic approach. The idea that deregulated finance could create a true market economy had resulted in governments such as the UK and Ireland becoming debtor states to prop up neoliberal ideology.

An opportunity for the rich to take advantage and shrink the social welfare state and deregulate power while presenting private markets as the way forward was promoted as the solution. The government reduced funding to local authorities who provide services local populations needed. As part of this the state controlled how much and to whom it would pay money to assist to house and support people many with disabilities. The Local Government Association (2019) stated councils will have lost almost 60p out of every £1 that was provided from central Government for services from 2010 to 2020. Alan Jones (2019) reported that there would be a £25bn funding gap in the coming years with reforms resulting in grants becoming almost none existent. The way Councils dealt with this could result in many following the route of Newham Council, and to raise money through a Lender Option Borrower Option (LOBO) loan as mentioned in the previous chapter.

In collaboration with Debt Resistance UK (2020) Focus E15 had used the lack of funding local authorities were receiving from central government to make people of Newham aware through a protest at Stratford station that Newham Council had taken out a LOBO loan. This was a result of Austerity as mentioned by Cooper and Whyte (2017) and was the only option considered by the Government to deal with the financial crisis resulting in cutting public spending that provided services such as care to the elderly. These were the services the local people engaging with the protest were mentioning such as people who had been forced out of Newham due to the Benefit Cap yet were having to travel back to make sure elderly relatives were eating and generally coping living alone.

Yet businesses created by Capitalists to provide these services had no responsibility if people could not afford to buy these services. Many people mentioned the cost of employing private carers was not realistic and if these businesses failed while previous Government contracts could not be allowed to fail if people did not receive care a private company was not concerned. This was part of the new welfare system where there was an opportunity to increase profits by employing people on flexible low paid contracts. Many of these workers would be immigrants happy to work for low pay rather than a local population who felt forced

under the new welfare system to undertake work as protection against unemployment. Also, there was the addition of a long a waiting period to receive money.

#### **4.2 Welfare Reform Act 2012**

The new welfare system was introduced through The Welfare Reform Act (2012) described by the government as simplifying benefits and is described in public notes as reducing the length of time spent on welfare. Part of this involved merging six benefits into one payment of Universal Credit (UC) and restricting how much money could be claimed through a benefit cap. The idea was to reduce what was called dependency on the state by only providing a very limited safety net for families experiencing temporary financial problems. The Welfare Reform Act included changing Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to Personal Impedence Payments (PIP) with a new threshold so many people had their payment reduced or removed. Also, Housing Benefit (HB) payments were radically reformed including charging social housing tenants for unused bedrooms (Bedroom Tax) also for those claiming HB in the private sector restrictions were put on how much could be claimed relating to age and only a set amount could be claimed, this was known as the Local Housing Allowance (LHA).

This was part of the legislation that resulted in when the young mothers being evicted from the Focus E15 hostel finding they were restricted about where they could now live as they suffered from the process of Universal Credit (UC). As part of UC changes were made to sickness benefit that became the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) that resulted in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and not a doctor deciding who was fit for work through an hour-long Work Capability Assessment (WCA). These, reforms were brought in under the flagship name of Universal Credit from where control could be exerted on people's lives. This brought about a major change to the social security system in the UK affecting around 8 million households where a method of control on people's lives through conditionality was introduced.

#### **4.3 Universal Credit (UC)**

The welfare benefits system in the UK had come under attack almost daily in the News as a waste of public money under the austerity policy of the government. As part of this unemployed and sick people were starting to be forced to claim Universal Credit (2019). One idea was to make payments feel like work so payment was made in arrears. Yet, if you did not have savings or were being transferred from another benefit, no thought was given to how you are meant to pay your household bills or buy food. Although, following protests including by MPs the period of time to wait for your first payment was reduced from six to five weeks. Many of the people who contacted Focus E15 were suffering as a result of this feeling alone and anxious with some working with the campaign often to challenge the Benefit Cap.

In 2019 on Gov.uk (2019) as of 11<sup>th</sup> July 2019 2.3 million people were in receipt of Universal Credit a 5% increase from 13<sup>th</sup> June 2019. Of this total 760,00 (33%) were having their wages topped up by the state. While 930,000 (41%) were undertaking job searches under the new conditionality regime that could mean they had to spend a set amount of time job searching and if they failed to satisfy a job coach, they were doing this could result in a sanction and loss of income. Of this 2.3 million, 1.3 million (55%) were female. The total amount of claims for Universal credit since its commencement was 5.1 million. These figures possibly explain why it was normally females who complained about their treatment by Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).

Many activists involved in Focus E15 will be asked to support individuals if they have any relevant work experience. Having worked for a Housing association when the Welfare

Reform Act was introduced, I was asked to support a single mother who had been signed off sick from work and to have her rent paid had to claim UC and was very concerned. This was due to posts she was aware of through social media which are partially confirmed by DWP statistics for July 2019 she had seen. The process, involved 3 appointments, receiving contradictory information during the process some of the highlights of a disjointed over bureaucratic system are set out in the following paragraphs.

As the first part of the process a Welfare Reform Officer at the local authority was contacted who although giving a good explanation of the process did not relieve the anxiety more than advising to make sure rent payments were taken from any UC award. On hearing this the single mother asked for this to be set in place, which was agreed. After a brief appointment to show ID where the job coach stated if he was to become her individual Job Coach, he would put no conditionality on to her claim as she was obviously under stress with work to return to.

The next appointment revealed the some of the inconsistency of the system. The next Job Coach informed the single mother there was no longer an entitlement to benefits until she had met set certain conditions including keeping a daily journal of Job searching and completing a Curriculum Viate even though she was in employment but currently unwell. Another appointment involved the Job Coach not being prepared for the interview or up to date with the case and the only advice being to make sure she kept in contact with her doctor. At this appointment it was revealed rent had not been paid directly from the Universal Credit award. This resulted in a Notice Seeking Possession of her home the next day.

On contacting her landlord, the single mother made a payment agreement and was informed the person who arranged the direct payment of rent was no longer employed so this could not be followed up. This further inconsistency of record keeping is another system failure that a long complaints process would result in further stress. At this point against a Doctor's advice the young mother to resolve her financial crisis returned to work. Although now being a working person in receipt of UC she had to take time off work to attend a UC appointment as failure to do so may result in being sanctioned and so UC and rent going unpaid.

The single mother said she felt targeted and let down by the system and found the second interview with the Job Coach dehumanising from the point of being informed although she was off sick from work there was no entitlement to benefits and had to undertake tasks to be entitled. Having to undertake tasks while she was meant to be recuperating and the failure to pay her rent or Jobcentre staff being adequately prepared for a meeting, she felt targeted. Being more worried about what would be a forthcoming in a Work Capability Assessment where DWP who were unaware of her medical history and would make a decision about her readiness to return to work she decided to take the decision herself to protect her family and keep her home by returning to work.

Some of the headlines that had been causing concern about claiming UC can be seen in Chaminda Jayanetti and Michael Savage (2019) reporting on Human Rights Watch report into Universal Credit. The report concluded the transition to UC with built in delays and waiting periods for money resulted in debt and was a punitive system with sanctions. In addition to being difficult to navigate or appeal decisions was not value for money and caused much distress and often food poverty. On speaking to this single mother again in 2020 she said now her debts were clear, she was in work that she enjoyed but it was a long battle where she still had to respond to UC texts and felt she was under the control of a system she felt it seemed she had battled all her life although she had a good University degree.

These feelings can be seen to be backed up by the research of Ruth Cain (2016) considering the stigmatisation of single mothers. The UC system has streamlined benefits with the aim of pushing people to work. This is contrast to the research of Mike Brewer et al. (2012) where the aims were to make it easier to claim benefits and make work pay. The single mother felt her health was never considered by DWP claiming benefits was complicated and the only aim seemed to be to obtain work. The fact while being off sick rather than convalescing conditionality to be ready for economic activity was prioritised over health and family. This actually clashes with Conservative ideals of being a good mother and engaging with your family. This division in families is taken further through out of borough placements due to the Benefit Cap.

#### **4.4 Benefit Cap and out of Borough Placements**

The benefit cap was introduced to limit the total amount of benefit most people aged 16 to 64 could claim. The rolling out of Universal Credit was reported by Department of Work & Pensions (2019) to be completed with figures released on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2019 relating to data up to May 2019. This revealed that 250,000 households had been capped and as of May 2019 the average weekly amount of benefit capped was £54 for households that contained children. As a consequence, many families especially, single mothers are struggling, having to choose between feeding their children or themselves or heating their homes. Many will approach local authorities for assistance. Due to the benefit cap many are advised to move to another area away from family, friends and support networks that would be of assistance if they obtained an offer of employment.

In Newham with the lack of social housing and availability of any source of affordable housing that meets the Local Housing Allowance as part of the overall Benefit Cap many homeless families are offered accommodation out of the borough or London. As reported by Emma Youle (2018) during investigating the homeless issues in Newham it was discovered from 2012 -2017 3,292 families were forced to accept housing outside of Newham. Of these 449 were sent out of London, with the time and cost involved in travelling to other parts of the country, this resulted in families moving away from jobs, schools, support networks and family. The new mayor of Newham Rokhsana Fiaz has placed the blame on the previous leader of the Labour Council, Sir Robin Wales. Although admitting this policy was not ideal it continues to this day while homes such as the 400 on The Carpenters Estate in Stratford remain empty. Through controlling the lives of the working class through restricting what money they receive coupled with the lack of housing at a local level brings people to the point they will act.

The case of one single mother, Sara, who had contacted Focus E15 had ended with a victory at The Courts of Royal Justice and another protest at Bridge House was another small victory. These two cases were in regard to where with private rents being so high in Newham paying this would break the benefit cap.

In investigating the cost of a private renting in Stratford in 2017 a new two-bedroom terrace house advertised in an estate agency window was £1,500 a month before any fees for deposits and referencing were taken. The alternative were rooms advertised in local newsagents' windows without details of costs. On phoning some of these the moment the word benefits were mentioned the answer was no and the phone put down. Having worked as a Welfare Reform Adviser in the Midlands with investment for the 2012 Olympics the situation in Newham appeared unique and required further investigation.

#### 4.5 Festival Capitalism

The lack of social housing or affordable housing for private rent, combined with the cost of paying for the 2012 Olympic Games and austerity has affected the population of Newham. The first impression of Stratford when leaving the station is of empty glass towers and vast contrast in wealth from these and a luxury shopping centre to a smaller outdated shopping centre. In their seminal article relating to large sporting, Richard Giulianotti et al. (2014) research partially answers what has occurred using the term *festival capitalism*. Newham, with high levels of poverty and ethnic diversity provided opportunity of the Olympics 2012 can be seen to have been used as the New right two-step policy in poor urban areas, through using Keynesian investment followed by neoliberal measures.

As Richard Giulianotti et al. (2014) stated, through a Keynesian approach of vast public spending on facilities and infrastructure wider development is promised. This is undertaken through a neoliberal approach to construction where private business companies such as construction and property establish privatised commercial businesses in the post-industrial urban areas. As this happens transitional capital and wealthier people move to the area. To undertake this residential and commercial properties undergo compulsory purchases, such as the publicly funded Olympic Stadium is finally sold to West Ham United as a new home. Newham Council had borrowed £40 million to help fund this transformation. Consumer developments such as the Westfield Shopping Centre, touted as the biggest in Europe was built, although this is owned by foreign families. The shopping centre sells products that are too expensive for the local population.

This transformation was much criticised due to the overall public cost, resulting in no economic benefit to Newham being among the many broken promises. No local people had been employed in the construction, people who came to the Olympics were funnelled away from Stratford and much local social housing was lost. On the Carpenter's Estate next to the Olympic Stadium 700 families had been decanted and 400 homes have been left empty for over 14 years with other residents in limbo today. The result was the formation of opposition and the protests such as Focus E15, who are prepared to challenge Newham Council as local people feel ignored without a voice in addition to suffering from the results of austerity and the welfare reforms.

In his seminal article Will Horwitz (2013) considers the impact of welfare reform on Newham. The Census 2011 gives the population as 308,000 and growing, roughly two thirds of working age. The average household size is 3.2% higher than any London borough, 80% of residents are none-white with 57% in employment. Interviewing people affected by the reforms showed that awareness and understanding was very low with people believing the benefit cap was a floor. There were concerns about delays in payments when switches occurred and a general feeling this reform was unfair. The switch to the flagship benefit of UC has caused many issues, especially for people with disabilities and single parents even before the cost of housing is considered.

The chapters on Focus E15 and the Changing UK disproportionately affecting Newham and Stratford in particular led to this research and resistance to change that came from Focus E15. From 2017 and my observations and discussions with individual activists particularly the Core group who were ever present during my visits opened the question of how a research project could proceed without bias. Considering David Silverman (2017) and using factual data such as from academic research, newspapers and backing this up with dates from the Focus E15 website through using an established methodology this was possible.

This chapter has considered the rise of austerity under neoliberalism and how the welfare benefit system was redesigned using the control of benefit payments and conditionality ultimately controlling where claimants could reside. How the process of using state money to create more capitalism is used the next section discusses the findings.

## CHAPTER 5 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Introduction

How the research project developed as a result of numerous visits to Stratford in Newham and observing the vast contrast between wealth and poverty is explained in Chapter 5. The use of urban space and reality of life in modern times I related to the writing of Henri Lefebvre in regard to Cities (1968). From the first visit in 2016 my interest in the social divisions within the area was sparked by a group of campaigners use of urban space in their campaigning. On observing and engaging with this group, I became aware of what I considered were key themes that were expressed in varying discussions with the core group and to at times changing my thought processes about who the group were. Although I considered what I was observing was actions against austerity the word was infrequently mentioned.

To anonymise the participants, they are referred to as A1 to A6. A1 and A2 were long term political activists who had first met the young mothers on Stratford Broadway. While A3 and A4 are mothers affected by the Welfare Reform Act and A3 was the mother of one of the original Focus E15 mothers. A5 and A6 were two of the most interesting members of the core group as their background was in the world of Art and there was no obvious reason to be drawn to Focus E15.

My interviews were open questions, based on themes developing during my observations at Focus E15 actions and the street stall. The group heavily emphasise a campaign against capitalism and sell on the street stall the RCG paper *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* in addition to it becoming apparent many were members of the RCG.

### 5.2 Involvement in Focus E15.

A1 and A2 had been selling *Fight Racism Fight Imperialism* on Stratford Broadway on behalf of The Revolutionary Communist Group. In doing this they met a group of young mothers from the Focus E15 Hostel who were obtaining signatures for a petition to remain in Newham. A2 said they arranged to go to the Hostel and speak to the young mothers along with A1 they realised the young mothers *'were great organisers and they realised this was an opportunity for collective action with the young mothers. Yet the mothers had never been involved in politics and it was important for the mothers to understand who they were. They could have met a group of right wingers. It was so powerful.* A2 added through working in schools she *'was spending so much time dealing with families and reassuring them about their futures as they were also being encouraged to move out of the borough'*. Although the situation was caused by the Welfare Reforms at no point was austerity mentioned and I felt when I asked about this, I would not be able to stop the conversation from these obviously politically motivated activists.

A3 was brought to the campaign as her daughter was one of the original mothers involved in the campaign. A4 was brought to the campaign as she was battling with Newham Council following her divorce and had been moved out of the borough to live in a studio flat with 3 children. A3 had personally suffered from her daughter and grand-daughter suffering from attempts to remove them from their family connections. I had interviewed A4 as she was a single mother suffering from the welfare reforms and lack of housing and had been observed being vocal and of strong opinions.

A5 was the only male who was regularly at the Street Stall and became a member of the core group. A5 said he had been drawn to this campaign due to what was happening in London with regard to housing. Having read Marx *'I went to an RCG meeting and also the*

*Aylesbury Estate where I saw people being attacked in trying to resist social cleansing'. As he was an artist and aware of Focus E15 'I came to the street stall to design art and feel privileged to do this as it feels like a communist movement and I am a communist'. A6 stated she was part of a team writing plays about none middle class issues that attract audiences to sell out events. 'My writing partner met someone who attended a march A3 was present at and from this point she became involved. As this section shows, each participant became affiliated with the movement in different ways that is attached to a personal interest be that political, artistic or from personally suffering partly due to the lack of housing.*

### **5.3 Housing/Empty Homes**

With the Focus E15 campaign being built from the lack of housing and with 400 empty homes standing empty on The Carpenters Estate for over 10 years, empty homes are a very hot topic with Focus E15. On discussing housing A1 was very powerful stating *'the new Mayor is caught in a system although not like the previous mayor Robin Wales, who now works for a right wing think tank. The new Mayor, Rokhsana Fiaz makes statements regarding The Carpenters Estate and Brimstone House (originally the Focus E15 Hostel) that the campaign monitors. The current plans regarding housing seem to be 50% affordable housing on Council owned land which show Rokhsana priorities when there are 28,000 people on the housing waiting list. The solution should be to build 30,000 council homes starting with The Carpenters Estate. It does not take the time of a failed masterplan to open up empty homes on which an estimated £35 million rental income has been lost. If the new Mayor was serious with the highest rate of homelessness in the UK where 1 in 15 of the population are homeless a good start would be to save The Carpenters Estate standing on Council owned land'.*

While A2 made a statement about housing and Capitalism used in the next section while A3 and A4 were unpolitical in their responses. I spoke to A3 about hearing about Focus E15 at a lecture at Ruskin College and how I could not believe what I was hearing about empty homes. A3 being local said *'its simple the homes need opening up and brought back to life'*. I have spoken to many local people on the street stall who give the same response while talking about their families being driven out of the area due to the lack of social housing being unable to pay expensive rents in the private sector.

A4 had said she had become involved in Focus E15 due the housing she had been provided with as she was moved out of Newham. She explained *'I was told if I did not accept housing in Birmingham, I would be considered intentionally homeless'*. I heard about Focus E15 and joined the campaign and have managed to obtain work so see no need to leave the area and Newham should house me locally without going into where in Newham.

A5, had said he had viewed what occurred on the Aylesbury Estate when resistance to evictions turned violent. Stating Focus E15 was more of a *peaceful inclusive movement where neoliberalism was used as a tool to protect Capitalism. We need to talk about Capitalism but the mention of the word disinterests people so he uses Art to explain what is occurring.* One of the banners designed by A5 was of a dragon consuming homes with the word **END THE HOUSING CRISIS DESTROY CAPITALISM**. This banner was often displayed across phone boxes used by the campaign on Stratford Broadway with posts of this on Social media obtaining many positive comments. Again, the comment was made *the empty homes need reopening, somebody has the keys.*

The interview with A6 was interrupted by a homeless person with mental health issues and on discussing housing opened a new revelation. On asking A6 about The Carpenters Estate she responded *'I am unsure what Rokhsana Fiaz is about. She is driven by Gangsters there*

are so many rumours about the power they hold over Newham Council. This led to spontaneous songs from the street stall aimed at Newham Council. Although I had heard comments about corruption this was the first mention of a book *Legacy*. This book is about the neglected east London borough hosting the 2012 Olympics. The book is about a claimed cover up of deaths and corruption of a tangled web of chief executives, big banks, politicians and dirty money involved in the bid process. This section leads to consider the key theme of Festival Capitalism that has changed the areas appearance as is occurring across much of London.

#### 5.4 Festival Capitalism

Festival Capitalism in Stratford can be seen to have occurred as publicly owned land was developed and transferred to the private sector. In this case land was used to build a public stadium that was then transferred to the ownership of a private football club. At the same time a privately owned shopping centre is expanded as part of a development called Stratford City as the demographics for the area are changed as transport links are improved. As this occurred public land was used to build expensive apartments that replace existing social housing and so the start of excluding the working-class inhabitants from living in the area.

On speaking about housing in relation to the Architects for Social Housing (ASH) presentation in The Carpenters Estate Community Centre about how refurbishment of the estate is a better option than demolition for social housing A2 stated. 'The Council is not a rational or homogenous body although the new Mayor seems to want to do the right thing and many people have had the opportunity.' The economic crisis causing 50% funding cuts and Newham Council are complicit with this and the addition of the London Development Council and restrictions due to the Olympics Capitalism does not provide for people. With the sixth richest economy affected by cuts to housing, healthcare, education research is not a simple answer it is the political ideology that needs changing. With what Labour Councils are doing with regards to housing across London and we are aware of the Tory position as housing campaigners we need to high lite and challenge this. Stratford with its glass-built towers does not provide for the people of Newham. A1 had talked about council land being sold and A3 had mentioned all politicians seemed to have the same agenda that did not help the working class with A6 stating mostly strongly about what she saw as the criminality with the new Major Rokhsana Fiaz seeming unable to take action to open up the empty homes.

Building construction of new apartments seems to be ever present around The Carpenters Estate with few remaining long-term residents. People frequenting the Street Stall and Focus E15 events complain about the unneeded type of housing and legislation brought in to strengthen this. What has occurred in Newham has an obvious link to Festival Capitalism. What amazed me having attended RCG events about housing and the RCG publishing a pamphlet *Whose Land is it Anyway* this link seems to have been missed.

*WHOSE LAND IS IT ANYWAY: HOUSING, CAPITALISM AND THE WORKING CLASS* appears to have been written in response to the Grenfell Tower fire of 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017. The publication focuses on the last 100 years history of council housing setting out the link between the price of land, public housebuilding, private development and those that have created today's housing crisis. Through moving on to consider the access working class people have to housing and the conditions the blame is put on main stream political parties especially the Conservatives and Labour parties and the only solution is to fight back. I find this idea is good to create solidarity but without coming up with workable alternatives it is hard to build momentum. Much of the conditions described in recent times were a result of recent Welfare Reforms.

## 5.5 Welfare Reforms

In addition to the original mothers suffering from the Welfare reforms A3 and A4 had very relevant personal stories relating to this while A1 dealt with some of the outcomes of this in her work.

A3 said it was the Welfare Reforms and the realisation her daughter with a new born baby after receiving an eviction notice from the Focus E15 hostel would have to move miles away from her support network she started questioning government policy. 'We were looking locally for accommodation in the local area but as my daughter was on benefits there were no options. I was not having my daughter miles away from her family with a new baby. The policy does not take into account support young mothers need from their families and with not being able to drive something had to be done'. A3 had revealed it had been her idea to engage with the other young mothers and get a petition that led to meeting the RCG and the start of the Focus E15 campaign.

A4 spoke of arguments with DWP at the Job Centre over UC one day recalling 'I was telling people do not claim UC'. She moved on to say something that made me realise the fear people on benefits suffer daily 'UC reminds me of Siberia where I lived through making sure people don't have enough food to live. This anxiety and worry can be seen from the experiences of A1.

A1 had said through her work in school she was becoming aware of 'families without money due to late payments due to the Welfare Reforms with many people missing meals'. In addition to the dehumanising experiences she was hearing about as people were forced to claim UC'.

The Welfare Reforms can be seen to back up Festival Capitalism through forcing poorer people out of an area as the demographics are changed. This type of displacement was observed by Ruth Glass (1964) who academically considered gentrification. The actions of the Focus E15 campaign had been brought about initially through a combination of a lack of housing, and the welfare reforms that support Festival Capitalism. The inspiring actions of this group led me to consider if the core group had a favourite action and what was the reason for this.

## 5.6 Direct actions

Having been present at a Housing event in central London where Focus E15 were present it was watching a continuing loop of all the actions the group had undertaken I started to think about if people had a favourite and why. Of the long-standing members of the core group the original occupation was the favourite while A4 chose another and A5 considered they were all very relevant.

A1, A2, A3 all considered the first large scale action of the opening of the show flat that brought Focus E15 into becoming known to the public as their favourite. A1 described this 'as so colourful, militant, challenging as beautiful flats were open for people to see. It was important to make people aware Labour Councils boarded up decent flats being kept unoccupied for political reasons. Although this was not expanded on having spoken to many people at Focus E15 and other events across London the working-class occupants see this as an attack on their lives. As they are forced to relocate from their communities social housing is replaced by a very small amount of so called 'affordable housing' and housing built for purposes of investment.

A2 stated 'the opening of 4 empty flats was momentous with lots of people involved. We were unsure of what would happen but during an event suddenly 2 young mothers appeared in the windows of the flats.' Again saying 'Labour Councils boarding up decent quality flats and keeping them unoccupied is political'. While A3 had said 'although we did not know what would happen it was such a success. This action made people aware of what was happening people brought donations of food and water but more so spirit was created'. The opening of the flats brought press coverage with the celebrity Russell Brand visiting the occupation and academics such as Paul Watt (2016) *The Nomadic War Machine in the Metropolis* academically writing about what was occurring. This description of how the Focus E15 campaign works leads to A4's favourite action.

During a monthly planning meeting an action was arranged to disrupt a meeting chaired by the mayor Sir Robin Wales. On Thursday 11 January 2018 vocal Focus E15 campaigners from the public gallery used a new propaganda weapon. Umbrellas were opened with words relevant to the campaign displayed. This was broadcast live on Youtube and spread by Focus E15 campaigners through social media where you could hear the voices of campaigners like A4 very clearly and the campaigners leaving with a chant of 'Newham Council we are watching you'. A5 stated he did not have a favourite and thought all actions were very relevant while the interruption in the interview with A6 meant no comment was forthcoming. Yet the power of broadcasting events through social media can do more than bring attention to the campaign.

### **5.7 Social Media and Art**

All of the core group considered social media as very powerful from recruiting and publicity to achieving victories. In exploring the links between social media and public space Jeffrey Juris (2012) argued while websites helped networking in social movements social media has contributed much more. Through the emergence of aggregation undertaken by masses of individuals from diverse backgrounds ensures the sustainability through broadcasts. As all people active with Focus E15 were of the opinion Newham Council monitored any posts it was felt another victory could occur without having to undertake a direct action.

At the October 2019 monthly meeting how to deal with another case of intentionally homeless made by Newham Council was discussed. A decision to use an Eviction Resistance call out via Facebook was used as to arrange another proposed mobilisation by The Nomadic War Machine. The Focus E15 (2020) website was used to publish an open letter to Newham's MP Lynn Brown from a young mother and her 21-month-old son facing eviction from Brimstone House.

The Focus E15 website stated:

October 12, 2019 housing crisis, JOIN US IN ACTION: Thursday 17  
October, Eviction Resistance, Victoria Street Stratford E15 (Focus E15,  
2020).

Attached to this was a letter written by a young mother resident at Brimstone House, and stated how she became homeless due to events out of her control and Newham Council was discharging its duty to her as she refused a housing offer. The offer of accommodation did not meet her needs and was unreasonable on various grounds mentioned in the letter. In brief the offer was refused as the young mother had a long-standing local connection to Newham since May 1996 and life had changed on falling pregnant in 2017. This meant shelving plans to work and save to buy a property and so she had joined the housing resister in June 2017. Following various errors within Newham Council confirmation of being live on

Homechoice was not confirmed until January 2018. On October 16<sup>th</sup> 2019 Newham Council backed down possibly not wanting another event published on social media and picked up by the press as the same way that occurred at The Royal Court of Justice in July 2018.

Social media is also used to share artwork made in support of the campaign and all campaigners agree this is very visual and powerful with banners used at actions. These events are shared across Social Media on many occasions when actions take place. People visiting the Saturday stall can observe an artist at work, at times being encouraged to add their personal experiences of the lack of housing to banners as they are designed. Having posted photographs of the artwork on social media I see the positive response this receives further afield than East London and how this attracts people to the Focus E15 campaign.

A5 who works as an artist in schools can be observed to have brought a level of professionalism to the banners that can be observed in how the quality has progressed. On speaking to A5 about what he thought art did for the campaign A5 reflected 'Artwork gets feedback. Although it takes time as institutions are lagging behind civil society, Marx saw this. Art, writing and music can break this down'. On observing a banner being designed about Brimstone House I asked how he felt about this. The banner was of a house with windows, in these windows residents and children of Brimstone House had been adding comments inside the windows. A5 said 'this gave people the opportunity to express their real feelings about what was going on in their world, that could be observed by all when normally they had no voice'.

Due to the interruption I could not take this interview further that is the danger of interviewing in a public location but what I observed was the solidarity of this group as the core members and people visiting the street stall burst into song and dance.

What I have been observing in my time spent with Focus E15 was community organising and the building of solidarity to defend individuals and challenge Newham Council. Sekou Franklin (2013) in her article for the *Community Development Journal* considers this as a viable political tradition. Great organisers as A2 described the young mothers on first meeting them will challenge social injustices often through linking with other groups. From this New Social Movements such as the Focus E15 campaign are the outcome to challenge grievances often through using numbers of participants.

The street stall in addition to direct actions broadcast on social media using vibrant Art work has attracted many people to support the challenges Focus E15 engage with. Some of these are people who feel isolated and unable to challenge Newham Council but with the support and solidarity of a group of committed activists makes these challenges more powerful resulting in success such as at the Bridge House and Royal Courts of Justice Protests.

### **5.8 Newham Council and Austerity**

From when I first became aware of Focus E15 Newham Council were always considered an issue from Sir Robin Wales who was the Mayor when the campaign commenced to the current Mayor Rokshana Fiaz. In addition to the interviews with the Core group I have engaged with many people on the street stall and at events. The overall feeling of people was Newham Council did not represent the people of Newham and seemed to undertake policy to promote the lives of certain people within the Council. During the Stratford Bus Station protest one comment that always stuck in my memory was the comment '*you could get a brick elected to Newham Council if you put a Labour Rosette on it*'.

During the protest outside East Ham Library to present the Newham People's Charter to the mayoral candidate Rokshana Fiaz during her Saturday surgery I was able to obtain views of

people in another part of Newham. On the Library gates being used to display banners the footfall of busy Stratford Broadway was not present. What became very noticeable was the number of cars honking horns in support for not re-electing Sir Robin Wales. The small amount of people who did pass all seemed to be of the opinion it was time for change due to the treatment people had in dealing with Newham Council under Austerity.

Throughout my time observing the Focus E15 campaign with austerity a very high-profile topic, affecting funding of public services with cuts to benefits affecting people's lives I was intrigued about if people saw the campaign as a reaction to austerity.

A1 stated 'what is occurring is more than austerity. There is ongoing deregulation of the system as part of neoliberalism. As part of this we are seeing privatisation that includes the sale of public land, issues with funding for schools, benefit issues that are all part of Capitalism and needs challenging. While, A2 who I have observed is possibly the biggest driver of the campaign made a very relevant statement regarding housing and the first mention of austerity. 'It takes a particular person to understand struggle and political consciousness of what is going on Capitalism can't provide housing. Robin Wales, the previous Mayor was a particularly nasty leader on top of austerity measures not much can be done, systemic issue'. A2 is calling for a change of system and is starting to reveal what is occurring is a battle against Capitalism and austerity is just a tool used by the system.

These are very powerful observations by committed activists who have been politically educated which left me wondering what responses I would obtain from others to this. The response from A3 although critical of politicians did not mention Capitalism 'each government just blames the past as does each Council for ongoing problems. To me it is all about money and those in control just do not care'. While A4 had an interesting response 'this is bigger than austerity the issue is Capitalism. The system needs poor people to create jobs and power'. Although she was unsure how this would occur.

While A5 said 'it's about Capitalism that is protected by neoliberalism and A6 said 'Capitalism has failed'. I was aware from these reactions there was a common thread that the problem Focus E15 was campaigning about was aimed at opposing the Capitalist system.

## **CHAPTER 6 SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

### **6.1 Summary**

Finally, Chapter 6 discusses how the research was undertaken and considers responses to the interview questions and key topics and then concludes if the movement was a result of austerity. Due to the large amount of data from the interviews and participant observation it was not straight forward to analyse. As, most of the activists involved in Focus E15 had very strong opinions regarding the social issues limiting the participants to those who most regularly attended the street stall simplified undertaking interviews. In addition, if any follow, up was required the task would not involve too much time. Also, I analysed the data manually looking for the most often repeated terms and words which provided the subtitles for the process of writing up the research.

As engagement with Focus E15 commenced in the spring and summer of 2017 as my ideas progressed by engaging with others who attended Focus E15 events enabled detachment from the core group thinking. This also helped in confirming impressions from observations as part of ongoing analysis. From my interviews it became obvious although there was a strong link with the RCG the key issues were Housing, Welfare Reforms and Newham Council and its Mayors. During the interviews all of these were mentioned over 20 times while the word Capitalism also became a regular response.

### **6.2 Discussion and Conclusion**

How people became involved in Focus E15 apart from the original mothers has always been of fascination. Although only one of the original mothers is still involved in the campaign and due to her changing situation, I was not able to interview her formally. Although I have spoken to this mother on many occasions it was being asked to leave the Focus E15 Hostel that drove her involvement. Although A3 is the mother of one of the original mothers, interviewing people from differing backgrounds regarding how they became involved in Focus E15 produced the following results.

A1 and A2 I was aware had been drawn to the group by meeting the young mothers but I had not been aware this had been seen as a political opportunity to support and grow an issue that could be visibly seen to have let down a working-class population. With the empty houses on the Carpenters Estate compared to the glass towers, a football stadium and high-class shopping centre the comparison is daily visible. Further the actions of Newham Council can and are challenged in showing the failures of Capitalism a stated aim of the RCG.

A3 and A4 both mothers had been drawn to protest due to personal experiences of people in a working-class community who had suffered due to the lack of social housing, welfare reforms and the actions of Newham Council. From these personal experiences and suffering social injustices they are drawn to challenging the political system through the political education they receive from the RCG. A5 was drawn to the protest from observing events across London relating to social cleansing and felt through his art he had a skill to offer the campaign through using art to educate people about what is occurring in regards to housing in London. While A6 heard about housing through the actions of the Nomadic War Machine that have become known through social media well respected across London.

While at a housing event in London attended by Focus E15 among others I observed a video playing recordings of many actions undertaken by the campaign I observed many of which I was unaware of. This brought about the thought of what action would be a favourite of members of the core group and why? A1, A2, A3 were very definite the opening of a show house that came to the notice of the national media was their favourite action. This was

considered as a political opportunity and went further in engaging people across the UK in the campaign and can be considered as the challenge to the authority of Newham Council.

While A4, A5 and A6 joining the campaign at a later date had not experienced this event personally. A4 felt an action by the Nomadic War Machine when they stated a loud protest that brought a Newham Council cabinet meeting to an early end was her favourite. During this action the Nomadic War Machine opened umbrellas with words relating to the campaign printed on them and broadcast this live using social media. A5 was none committal stating they felt all the actions were significant and equally important. A6 did not get chance to contribute due to the interruption of the interview and for personal reasons there was no opportunity to follow this up.

These people coming together as a social movement is how Mario Diani (1992) considered informal interactions. A1 and A2 who are strongly political saw the problem through the wider lenses of Capitalism. While A3 and A4 having both been affected by policy of Newham Council saw this as a local issue. While A5 and A6 have a cultural interest through using art to describe social injustices. Through this a coalition of protesting and using individual talents Focus E15 is driven to act as a Nomadic War Machine. The choice of A5 and an umbrella protest bringing a Council meeting to an early conclusion and broadcasting this across the internet is an example of the work of Castells (2015). Castells stated social movements through using the internet had the opportunity to bring locally based political actions to a wide audience. Through the broadcasting of other events it can be seen how political policy can be changed at a micro level influencing populations as global society is networked.

The Carpenters Estate with its empty homes shows how housing in the UK with no general overall national plan as discussed by Kate Barker (2014) does not meet housing need. The result is areas such as Stratford are ideal for luxury housing developments investment as the research of Giulianotti et al. (2014) revealed. With Newham borough suffering high levels of poverty and ethnic diversity, the 2012 Games although suffering protests over the staging was likely not to receive co-ordinated protest so a policy of Keynesian investment followed by deep neo-liberal measures could be undertaken. So, the criticism around a lack of local jobs and business benefits and environmental issues would not need a response, resulting in the idea of an Olympic legacy that would never surface.

The moving of people out of the borough can be related back to the work of Ruth Glass (1964) where the term 'gentrification' was first used to describe moving people away from the area of their homes. In the case of Newham this was intensified by the measures of the Welfare Reform Act 2012 and led to the protests against social cleansing and Newham Council and its Mayors. Focus E15 working in partnerships with others to provides solutions to problems can be seen in the work of Architects for Social Housing (2018). This type of thinking of proposals with regard to housing and increasing current stock connects with the wider community is a feature of the work of Duncan Bowie (2017) *Radical Solutions To The Housing Supply Crisis*. Part of Bowies' conclusion is the fact a new housing strategy is required to include the fact it is not feasible for all to become home owners and this needs to dictate new housing supply. As house price increases cannot be controlled and increased supply does not control this government assistance will always disadvantage some. There needs to be a rebalance between public and private housing with a new strategic approach to deliver homes that are needed that includes a 50% increase to housing stock.

The actions of Newham Council after giving the young mothers eviction notices meant Sir Robin Wales as Mayor was constantly brought to people's attention resulting Rachel Burford (2019) reporting on alleged fraud and overspending. The publishing of Michael Gillard's

*Legacy* (2019) regarding corruption and the Olympic Games brought further claims against Sir Robin Wales period as Mayor of Newham. This identified much of the mismanagement of money and strange dealings of Wales cabinet possibly leading to his removal from power. The new Mayor has commenced an investigation into Wales leadership of Newham Council, the empty homes, and treatment of residents as seen in the research of Hardy and Gillespie (2016) and highlighted by the Focus E15 campaign. To date nothing seems to have changed more than promises to develop a plan for housing and changes in how Newham Council will interact with people. What I was observing was a reaction to austerity as considered nationally by Cooper & Whyte (2017) or within Newham through research undertaken by Caritas Anchor House (2019), this was not seen by the core group.

There, is a direct link with core themes and the following academic literature such as Steve Buechler (1995) and New Social Movement Theories in understanding Focus E15 as a New Social Movement. Buechler's article, offers an overview of analysing cotemporary forms of collective action linking to the past work of Castells, Touraine, Habermas, and Melucci as a model. Finally, new social movement theory involves a distinction between the political and cultural. With regard to the topic of housing and the crisis particularly in London, Michael Edwards (2016) considered the ideologies of wealth and power compared to the poverty and challenges from people. This included looking at the financialisation and privilege of rent accumulation and the dispossession and control used through austerity. He Concluded by arguing that this may result in a unification of social movements challenging the Capitalist system.

With specific regards to Newham the empirical fieldwork research of Giulianotti et al. (2014) in East London. This had been undertaken in 3 parts, firstly the setting, secondly a new right two-step of investment in sport in poor urban areas finally the commodification of the area and resistance. While the work of Suzanne Fitzpatrick and Beth Watts (2017) considers how tenure for social housing tenants is used with welfare and impacts residents' lives. What occurs to the residents of the area is the academic work of Paul Watt (2018) considering the right to the City.

All of the protest actions are broadcast live on social media and written about on the Focus E15(2020) website. These events use as Milbrandt (2010) points out, banners with short sharp narratives of what is occurring. Nouredine Miladi (2016) considered the growing impact of social media that connects groups and educates young people using the art of previous generations to give a short cutting edge to what is occurring in society. This is considered in the academic work of David Harvey (2007).

Writing about neoliberalism as creative destruction Harvey (2007) sees this as a hegemonic discourse that has an influence on thought processes and political economic life and the way we need to live and understand the world. This results in austerity becoming the common-sense and only reaction to a banking crisis. As a project neoliberalism has enabled the dismantling of institutions that support people and replacing these services with alternatives that are not adequately funded. This has resulted in the growth of fee charging alternatives such as private health care rather than the NHS.

The fact that during interviews and observations austerity was barely mentioned in an urban area that has suffered starts to help understand how political education by groups like the RCG can influence thought in areas where people suffer. Whereas, I considered what I was investigating was a reaction to austerity as part of a neoliberal project influenced by my academic political education at University. In the real lived experience organisations that grew from the Occupy movement such as Focus E15 have an alternative view.

The Focus E15 movement has grown from considering the challenges caused through the housing crisis and welfare reforms to use art and social media and solidarity to successfully challenge Newham Council on issues of social justice. During this process the group has gone through political education and regularly challenge what is considered a failing Capitalist system that does not provide for the working class. Focus E15 work in partnerships with others to provides solutions to problems such as the empty home issue.

Whereas, I considered austerity as part of neoliberal project to socially restructure an area challenged by organisations that grew from the Occupy movement, the challenge of Focus E15 is a challenge against Capitalism supported by the Revolutionary Communist Group. Focus E15 with the backing of the RCG and various groups and academics considering the issue such as empty homes should possibly be the organisation to produce solutions to move Stratford and Newham forward based on community cohesion rather than a council led agenda.

## **APPENDIX**

The interviews took place on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> June 2019 to avoid the meetings of the Focus E15 Core Group, and other groups who rent the office space to use and the Focus E15 monthly meeting.

The interview with A1, took place on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> June 2019 at Sylvia's Corner, 95 Aldworth Road, Stratford, London E15 4DN.

The interview with A2, took place on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> June at Sylvia's Corner, 95 Aldworth Road, Stratford, London E15 4DN.

The interview with A3, took place on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> June on Stratford Broadway, London E15 1NG.

The interview with A4, took place on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> June on Stratford Broadway, London E15 1NG.

The interview with A5, took place on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> June on Stratford Broadway, London E15 1NG.

The interview with A6, took place on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> June on Stratford Broadway, London E15 1NG.

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